

Dying in the Light of Eternity

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Abstract

In the debate about whether death is harmful to the one who dies, both Epicureans (who think it is not) and anti-Epicureans (who think it is) assume that death is the end of existence. While common among philosophers, this is a minority position worldwide. Most humans accept an afterlife. What happens to the debate about the badness of death if we assume that there is an afterlife? I restrict my attention to the afterlife offered in the world's Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam). I argue that in these religions, dying falls under the category of transformative experience. Consequently, while some Epicurean arguments fail outright, the fate of others becomes sensitive to the details used to fill out the main account of the badness of death (deprivations, according to which dying is bad because of all of the things we miss out on while dead). Specifically, versions of deprivationism that take into account time-relative interests may still be vulnerable to Epicurean counterarguments. I also argue that an Abrahamic afterlife allows the Epicurean to solve one of their own puzzles about death, namely by giving a novel explanation for why killing can still be wrong even though it does not harm the victim.

INTRODUCTION

Epicureans about death hold that death is not harmful to the one who dies. The typical debate between Epicureans and anti-Epicureans takes as an assumption that death represents the end of a person's existence. Abrahamic religions disagree. The goal of this essay is to reassess the Epicurean/anti-Epicurean debate without assuming that existence ends at death. Instead, we will assume that something very like the Abrahamic Afterlife obtains after death. In the process, we will see that an Abrahamic Afterlife helps provide an answer to a natural question for the Epicurean: namely, if dying is not harmful to the one who dies, then what grounds the general prohibition on killing?

SECTION: DYING AS A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

LA Paul offers us a thought experiment. Suppose you have the option to become a vampire. Life as a vampire, your creature-of-the-night friends assure you, is fantastic. You can live on sustainable blood from the butcher, you have eternal life, eternal youth, great looks, and free reign of the streets at night. Would you be able to make this decision rationally?¹

Paul argues no. Becoming a vampire, she contends, is a *transformative experience*. According to Paul, a transformative experience has two components. First, it is epistemically inaccessible. There is no way to know what it would be like to undergo the experience. Second, it is personally transformative. The preferences, plans, and desires of the agent are radically different after undergoing the experience. The choice to become a vampire is consequently the choice to adopt a radically different life and persona, and to do so with no idea what it would be like.

The idea that there are some things experiences that can only be known by the experiencing is fairly common among philosophers. Thomas Nagel argued that we cannot know what it is like to be a bat.² Perhaps the most famous example comes from Frank Jackson. Jackson introduces the character Mary, a color scientist who has lived her entire life in a room with only black and white objects. Mary, Jackson argues, cannot tell what it is like to see red until she leaves her room and experiences a red thing.³ With these as key examples, Paul defines an experience as epistemically transformative in case what it is like to undergo that experience is impossible to know without going through the experience.

The phenomenon of having one's preferences, plans, and desires upended over time is fairly mundane. It's the normal course of a life, and is a longstanding subject of ethical reflection. Derek Parfit asks us to consider a Russian noble, who early in life is a reformer, seeking to better society and help the less fortunate.

¹ L.A. Paul [2014]. *Transformative Experience*. Oxford: OUP.

² T. Nagel [1974]. "What is it Like to be a Bat." *The Philosophical Review* 83:435-450.

³ F. Jackson [1982]. "Epiphenomenal Qualia." *Philosophical Quarterly* 32: 127-136.

Over time, this noble's preferences align more closely with the interests of the landowning class, and later in life is a steadfast defender of the status quo. Parfit's Russian noble has undergone personal transformation, not in a single experience, but over the course of years.⁴

A shorter familiar personal transformation happens in what is known as the "mid-life crisis." Adults stereotypically near the age of 40 undergoing a mid-life crisis take drastic steps, such as changing their career, ending long-running relationships, and spending lots of money seeking excitement and the feeling of youth. Their preferences, desires, and plans are overturned, often in a matter of weeks or months. This shortens the timeline, but is not yet a single experience. For that, we must look to events like religious conversions or personal epiphanies. These moments of insight or clarity can and often do cause a person to change their values, plans, and desires in dramatic ways.

What Paul refers to as transformative experiences combine epistemic and personal transformations. A transformative experience is one that realigns the agent's values, preferences, desires, and plans while being the sort of thing that you can't know what it's like to experience without undergoing it. This makes the decision to undergo a transformative experience difficult to rationally evaluate. The preferences of the agent pre-experience and those of the agent post-experience differ radically, the agent pre-experience can't anticipate what the experience will be like, and post-experience the personal transformation will have already occurred. This makes neither the agent's pre-nor-post-experience preferences promising candidates for evaluating the decision to go through the experience.⁵

In the Abrahamic religions, death fulfills the requirements of a transformative experience. Since all three Abrahamic religions teach the natural immortality of the human person, dying is not the endpoint of a life, but a transition point in it. Upon dying, the person enters the afterlife. Visions of the afterlife are very different, both within and across Abrahamic faiths. One might then reasonably worry what happens if some viable images of the afterlife within a given faith make death a transformative experience, and some do not. How should we regard death?⁶

My contention here will be rather minimal: in each of the Abrahamic faiths, we can find at least one viable image of the afterlife which makes death fit the definition of a transformative experience. A viable image of the afterlife is one that a generic orthodox adherent of the faith doesn't know won't obtain, assuming the religion's non-negotiable teachings are true. In this case, we should think of death in that religion as equivalent to a lottery among the viable images of the afterlife. And, as Hájek and Colyvan argue, lotteries that include a transformative experience in their possible payouts should be treated decision-theoretically as transformative experiences.⁷ This works through a process known as "contagion." Roughly speaking, in a formal decision theory, the value assigned to a prospect is always equivalent to a mixture of two other prospects, one more valuable than it and one less valuable, at some probabilistic weighting. Thus, getting \$1 for sure is equivalent to a bet pays \$2 at 50% and \$0 at 50%. But when, as in a transformative experience, there is a utility gap (that is, a prospect that pays '?'), the gap "infects" every other prospect, because one cannot do math with a question mark. Thus, establishing that death could be a transformative experience according to a religion is sufficient to establish the reasonability of treating death as a transformative experience according to that religion.⁸

SUBSECTION: CHRISTIANITY

First, I will argue that dying and entering the Christian afterlife is epistemically transformative. That is, that what it is like cannot be known except by experiencing it. An initial argument comes from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. He concludes a passage on the nature and enduringness of love with the following:

⁴ D. Parfit [1984]. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon, p. 327.

⁵ Just as in the literature on death, we can ask (as Epicurus did) when the harm of death applies to an agent, in the literature on transformative experience, we can ask when a transformative experience creates a problem for an agent. The way the problem is structured, it comes up as soon as the agent deliberates about an experience that they think might be transformative.

⁶ One issue I will set aside here: there are good reasons to think that the goods and ills of the afterlife and of the present life are incomparable. If so, the question of how dying affects the overall career of an agent becomes slightly more complicated. A reasonable initial pass would represent the value of an agent's career as a vector, with one value for the value of their current life and another for the value of their afterlife. Climenhaga [2018] and Rubio [2020] discuss some of the options for representing the value of lives that extend past death, and this paper section n discuss this issue somewhat, but for I will write as if we have eliminated this possibility since fully addressing it would go too far beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷ More precisely: the utility gaps created by transformative experiences "infect" the expected utility of any lotteries involving them. A. Hájek & M. Colyvan [2016]. "Making A do Without Expectations." *Mind* 125 (499):829-857.

⁸ Another concern: perhaps death is too severe a transformation, so that a person's identity is not retained into sufficiently different afterlives. If this is the case, the best the religious can hope for is for there to be people in the afterlife who remember being them and whose situation is partially determined by their actions in the present life. How much this is a concern will turn on details of an account of identity over time, and after noting the possibility I will set it aside.

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away with; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away with. For we know part and prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away with....For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, and love remain, and these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor 13:8-13, NASB)

Of particular note to us is the remark that we now see in a mirror dimly. Images in a dimly lit mirror tend to be distorted and difficult to distinguish. Although the quoted passage does not make it entirely clear, the standard reading of 'then' in the key sentence is as a reference to the afterlife.⁹

Aquinas, writing about the state of the blessed, asks whether it is possible for them to perceive the divine essence and presents an extensive case for the negation. He then argues that it is possible, but only in a state of union with the divine:

When therefore intellectual light is received into the soul, together with the indwelling Divine essence, though they are not received in the same way, the Divine essence will be to the intellect as form to matter: and that this suffices for the intellect to be able to see the Divine essence by the Divine essence itself....Therefore, since the Divine essence is pure act, it will be possible for it to be the form whereby the intellect understands: and this will be the beatific vision. Hence the Master says (Sent. ii, D, 1) that the union of the body with the soul is an illustration of the blissful union of the spirit with God. (ST III Supplement Q 92 Article 1)

In other words, the beatific vision is beyond human ken until union with God is achieved.

Similar is true of the other destination. The defining characteristic of the Christian doctrine of hell is separation from the divine. What it is like to endure this separation is unknown, but described in fierce metaphors - from "darkness, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 25:30, NASB) to burning with fire. Augustine considered the punishment of hell unknowable apart from revelation, writing in *The City of God*:

For as soon as those who are not written in the book of life have been judged and cast into eternal fire — the nature of which fire, or its position in the world or universe, I suppose is known to no man, unless perhaps the divine Spirit reveal it to some one — then shall the figure of this world pass away in a conflagration of universal fire, as once before the world was flooded with a deluge of universal water." (XX, Ch. 16)

So in Christian thought, dying is (or could be) epistemically transformative.

What about personal transformation? It is standard Christian teaching that spiritual progress involves a transformation of desires. In a classic on spiritual progress, Theresa of Avila writes "farther on [the road to spiritual progress], the soul is pleased with all that comes, because it desires nothing but what God wills." Given the manifest fact that most people die before reaching an advanced state of spiritual progress, Christianity divides over what happens upon dying.

Protestants generally hold that the saved who die are immediately perfected. This is put succinctly in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a classic statement of protestant thought

Q. 37. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Part of being made perfect in holiness involves a radical realignment of preferences, values, and desires. A personal transformation.

In older branches of Christianity, only those who attained perfection in this life enter heaven upon their death. Anyone else who dies in a state of grace enters purgatory. The purpose of purgatory is to bring the person to a state of perfection - it is a way of effecting a personal transformation, albeit in a way traditionally conceived as more gradual. Nevertheless, it is not a process that can be halted (no one in purgatory ends up other than perfect), and so dying sets in motion an inevitable personal transformation.

Hell, likewise, changes its denizens. The primary torment of hell is the "pain of separation," the pain that comes from being excluded from the beatific vision. In order for this to be a pain, the sufferer must value or desire the beatific vision. And yet the traditional path to hell largely involves a failure to desire or value the beatific vision. With full knowledge of the world's eschatological structure, those in hell are personally transformed.

⁹ In his second letter to the Corinthians (12:1-6), he makes a similar remark. In that passage, he calls what a man experienced in a vision of heaven inexpressible, providing further evidence for the epistemic unavailability of facts about the Christian afterlife to those in this life.

SUBSECTION: JUDAISM

In recent work, Aaron Segal outlines two Jewish views of the afterlife. One he calls Intellectualism and the other he calls Devotionalism. If Intellectualism is the right view, death is clearly a transformative experience. Things are less clear if Devotionalism is true, but arguably death is transformative on this view too.

Intellectualism, defended by the medieval philosopher Gersonides.¹⁰ While it is not the only Jewish view (and Segal levels a number of critiques of it), it is an important one and where I will focus my attention. According to Intellectualists, when we come to know some eternal truths, those truths become part of the constitution of our intellect and thereby our person. When we die, assuming we knew some eternal truth, the afterlife consists in a perfect disembodied contemplation of those eternal truths we learned in life.

Intellectualist afterlife clearly amounts to an epistemic transformation. We cannot know what it is like to be disembodied without undergoing the experience, and while we may get some time to contemplate eternal truths during this life, even the most dedicated mathematician cannot contemplate only eternal truths for very long. This is a state of being that must be experienced to be known.

Just as clearly, intellectualist afterlife amounts to a personal transformation. We typically have many plans, desires, and values that don't involve contemplating eternal truths and do involve being embodied. All of those will fall by the wayside if the intellectualist is correct. Intellectualists typically describe their afterlife as one of peace and serenity. For this to be true of beings like us, we must undergo a personal transformation.

Devotionalism, by contrast, looks closer to an extension of earthly life. For Devotionalists, the afterlife consists in an embodied existence available to those who sufficiently devoted themselves to God. Upon death, the sufficiently devoted exist in an interim state until the final resurrection, enjoying those benefits of their afterlife that they can without being embodied. Upon the final resurrection, they enter into an ever-closer union with the divine that we may regard as Judaism's take on the beatific vision.

However, while Devotionalism offers a stronger continuity with the present life than Intellectualism – it is embodied, for instance – it still calls for a fairly stark discontinuity. According to Jewish tradition (Segal cites a 3rd century source), the afterlife will not involve eating, drinking, or procreation. In defending Devotionalism against the very charge that it does not offer a different enough afterlife (unlike Intellectualism's intentional strangeness), Segal makes the case that it involves what look like both epistemic and personal transformations. He writes:

In some versions of Devotionalism, the character of one's eternal afterlife, though embodied, is indeed radically different from the character of one's life now. The suggested differences are agential (we are no longer able to turn against God), motivational (we no longer desire evil), and even epistemic (we have a qualitatively different sort of knowledge of God). (Segal [2017] p. 158)

However, he eventually hedges on how severe this discontinuity is. I am inclined to say that the differences outlined – an embodied life without the demands of physical maintenance or certain normal human relationships such as the romantic/erotic, and occupied in an ever-closer union with God which has no strong present analog – is enough to count as a transformation. But even if it does not, the fact that Intellectualism is a live option is enough to trigger the contagion argument and license us to treat death in Judaism as a transformative experience.

SUBSECTION: ISLAM

As in Christianity, the afterlife in Islam includes two classical outcomes: eternal salvation and eternal damnation. In a preliminary judgement, one's book of deeds is assessed. A favorable ratio of good to bad deeds results in reward; an unfavorable one results in punishment. A final judgement makes these initial assessments permanent. As in the other Abrahamic religions, Islamic scripture provides a vivid description of the blessedness of the faithful and the brutality of the punishment of the damned. The extent to which these descriptions are to be taken literally is disputed – the Quran itself acknowledges a combination of literal and figurative language:

He it is Who has revealed the Book to you; some of its verses are decisive, they are the basis of the Book, and others are allegorical; then as for those in whose hearts there is perversity they follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. but none knows its interpretation except Allah, and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord; and none do mind except those having understanding. ~ Surah 3:7

However, for our purposes, we can draw two fairly uncontroversial claims from the text. (i) the pleasures and pains of the afterlife are beyond anything we experience in this world, and (ii) the truth of what they are like, including the correct way of interpreting various claims made about them in religious texts, is known only to

¹⁰ A. Segal [2017] "Immortality: Two Models." *Jewish Philosophy Past and Present*. New York: Routledge, 151-162.

Allah. While Islam has enough information for the faithful to act so as to achieve a favorable balance in the book of deeds, knowledge of the afterlife and what it is like can only be achieved through experience.

This is sufficient to argue that dying is a transformative experience in Islam. Recalling the definition of a transformative experience, two conditions must be met. First: the agent must learn something from the experience that they could have learned except by experience. Second: the agent's preferences must be transformed. Although we know some broad outlines of the experiences of the afterlife, (e.g. that it will be good for the faithful and terrible for the damned), we do not know what either destination will be like. Even provided with vivid imagery, we do not know how literal the correct interpretation of that imagery should be. We can only find out by experience. This fulfills the first condition.

Second: the Islamic judgement involves a falling away of any forgetfulness and self-deception. Anyone who experiences it will come to see their deeds in the light of truth, and will be able to accurately assess the desires and motivations of their former selves. For the vast majority of humanity, such a process of revelation will be personally transformative. With perhaps the exception of the rare saint, most people's preferences are informed by a combination of self-interest, confabulation, and ego-defense alongside nobler inputs. Especially for those whose deeds do not hold up to scrutiny, this encounter with truth will result in a reordering of their desires. This fulfills the second condition. We have a viable interpretation of the Islamic afterlife that makes dying a transformative experience.

SECTION: ARGUMENTS FOR EPICUREANISM REVISITED

Now that we have explored the Abrahamic afterlives and argued that dying is, according to the Abrahamic religions, a transformative experience, we can now assess the impact of these conclusions on the main lines of argument for and against Epicureanism.

Here we will look at some of the major arguments for Epicureanism to see how they hold up in the presence of an afterlife. We begin with two non-starters: the no locus of harm argument and the Lucretian symmetry argument. The no locus-of-harm argument goes as follows:¹¹

- (1) If death harms the one who dies, it either harms them before dying or after dying (premise)
- (2) For something to be harmed, it must exist (premise)
- (3) If someone is dead, they do not exist (premise)
- (4) So death does not harm the one who dies after dying (2, 3)
- (5) Before dying, the one who dies is not dead (premise)
- (6) An event cannot inflict harm before it occurs (premise)
- (7) So death cannot harm the one who dies before dying (5, 6)
- (8) So death cannot harm the one who dies (1, 4, 7)

Premise (3) is a non-starter if there is an afterlife. Perhaps some other argument could establish that death is not harmful to the one who dies after dying, but it will not be because there is no locus for the harm. Next, the symmetry argument.¹²

- (1) Time before birth and time after death are indistinguishable (premise)
- (2) Before birth, no one is harmed (premise)
- (3) If S is a state of being unharmed, and S' is indistinguishable from S, then S' is a state of being unharmed (premise)
- (4) After death, no one is harmed (1, 2, 3)

Once again, we have a non-starter as a premise. Premise (1) is clearly false if there is an afterlife. So the Lucretian argument fails.

We now turn to an argument that is less obviously undermined by an afterlife, the no-right-kind-of-harm argument advanced by Rubio [2021]. This argument takes Korsgaard's [1983] two distinctions in goodness to divide the possible kinds of harm into four quadrants, and then argues that on the supposition that death is the end of existence, none of those quadrants provides an appropriate harm. Korsgaard pointed out two axes dividing various goods. There is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goods, and there is the distinction between final and instrumental goods. This leaves four possibilities for how death could be a harm: extrinsic and instrumental, extrinsic and final, intrinsic and instrumental, or intrinsic and final.

¹¹ This argument comes from Epicurus, whose views may be found in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley [1987]. *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Volume 1, Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹² R. Melville & D. Fowler [1999]. *Lucretius: On the Nature of Things*. Oxford: OUP.

Rubio's argument proceeds possibility by possibility, arguing that each in its turn does not provide a sufficient harm to count as the harm of death as expressed in our practices and moral lives. Rubio argued that the fact that a death is a death partially depends on the arrow of time, since without a sense of sequence it doesn't make sense to call the an endpoint of a life a death. In the presence of an afterlife, the symmetry between the two endpoints of a life is broken, so a death can be identified not by its position in a sequence but by its proximity to the afterlife. However, proximity to an afterlife - like the arrow of time - in the grounding story of why a death is a death prevents it from having its axiological properties intrinsically. If Rubio's initial argument against death as an intrinsic harm works, it continues to work in the presence of an afterlife.

Similarly, Rubio's argument that death is not an extrinsic final harm remains intact. Rubio raised two objections to death as an extrinsic final harm. The first pointed out that different deaths seem to involve different levels of harm.¹³ The death of someone after a complete life that sees its great projects to completion is different from the death of someone early in life, with plans and desires unfulfilled. This seems hard to explain if the harm of death is a final harm, since there is no obvious natural scale for comparing the badness of various deaths. On views like Deprivationism, we can compare the badness of two deaths by looking at the goods and ills denied the people who die by their death. But if death is a final harm, this kind of scale is unavailable. Any attempt to create a scale by comparing the lives of those who die, or by comparing those lives to the lives they missed out on, seems like it will lapse into an instrumentalist view. It seems strange to appeal to instrumental reasons to explain why death 1 is worse than death 2, but not to explain why the two deaths are bad.

The second pointed out that it allows for odd counterfactuals. The arrow of time is explained by entropy.¹⁴ If death is an extrinsic final harm, than if the universe's entropy had started higher, or evolved in different ways, then death would not be harmful. This too is not changed by the addition of an afterlife. We may summarize Rubio's argument graphically, as in figure 1.

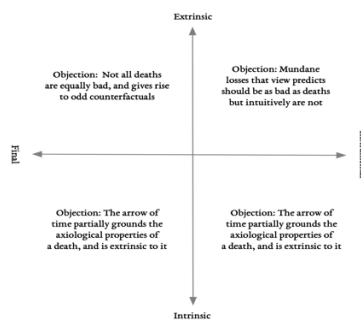


Figure 1: Graphical Representation of Rubio's Argument

However, Rubio's argument against death as an extrinsic instrumental harm must be changed. The most popular extrinsic instrumental account of the harm of death is known as deprivationism.¹⁵ According to deprivationists, the harm of death (if harm there be) consists in the goods and experiences the agent would have enjoyed if they were not busy being dead. Rubio argued that we do not generally regard the loss of goods we would have gotten had some event not occurred as a harm, using examples from casinos, the stock market, and relationships that never were. The core deprivationist thought is that the axiological status of a death is determined by what happens after a death. In the case where death is the end, this is nothing, and it is then compared against what would have been. In the case where death is not the end, what happens next is the afterlife. This allows us to say that whether dying is good or bad for the one who dies depends on what the afterlife is like.

Deprivationism gets developed in two different ways. Fred Feldman's [1991] *Total Life View* measures the goodness of the two lives (actual and alternative) from an impersonal standpoint. Jeff McMahan's [2002] *Time-Relative Interest View* measures the goodness of the two lives from the perspective of the present person, with future goods and ills discounted by the change in psychological connectedness between the present person

¹³ See McMahan [2002]. *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life*. Oxford: OUP section 2.2 for a developed presentation of the argument for better and worse deaths.

¹⁴ D. Albert [2000]. *Time and Chance*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; E. Chen [2020]. "Time's Arrow in a Quantum Universe: On the Status of Statistical Mechanical Probabilities," in *Statistical Mechanics and Scientific Explanation: Determinism, Indeterminism, and Laws of Nature* ed. Valia Alori, pp 479-515.

¹⁵ The first modern deprivationist was T. Nagel [1970]. "Death" *Noûs* 4 (1):73-80. Developed accounts may be found in F. Feldman [1991]. *Confrontations With the Reaper: A Philosophical Study of the Nature and Value of Death*. New York: OUP and B. Bradley [2009]. *Well-Being and Death*. Oxford: OUP.

and their future selves. While Feldman's view is relatively straightforward (fixing the referent of 'the alternative life' is challenging, but not a challenge we can take up here), the idea of time-relative interests in McMahan's view deserves further attention.

To see how what McMahan means by time-relative interests, we can revisit Parfit's Russian Noble. When making decisions, Parfit argues, it is reasonable for the young noble to discount the interests of his future self. After all, his future self is a very different person; his values and preferences are inverted. Effectively pursuing the projects of the noble's younger and older selves pull in opposite directions. One must give. And when the younger noble is considering what is good for himself, he should use his current preferences and values as his guide. This means that benefits to his future self do not count for as much. In fact, McMahan argues, we should generally discount future benefits and malefits by exactly as much as the difference between the core preferences, hopes, desires, fears, and values of our present and future personae.

To see the time-relative interest view in action, consider a triage scenario.¹⁶ Two victims suffer from head injuries. The medical staff may treat one or the other. If treated, each will reach full physical health. One of the victims, however, will have amnesia while the other will not. Nevertheless, the well-being each would enjoy were they to be the one treated are on a par. Thus, the total value of the potential futures is roughly equivalent. Nevertheless, partisans of the time-relative interest view would say that the non-amnesiac should be the one treated, because they have a much greater time-relative interest in that future life. After all, the amnesiac will have the psychological connection between themselves and their future self shattered. Preferences, hopes, desires, fears, values, and projects between their pre and post treatment self will be radically disconnected. As a result, the value of that future *to them* should be severely discounted. By contrast, the non-amnesiac faces no such discount. Defenders of time-relative interest take such cases as reasons to prefer their view, since they accord with intuitive judgments about whom to treat.

On a time-relative interest account, anything after a transformative experience must be heavily discounted. The very similarities that Parfit and McMahan argue ground egoistic concern for future goods and ills are undercut by personal transformation. As a result, the goods or ills of an afterlife will rarely make a major impact on the evaluation of the two lives. The discount will be too heavy.

This leaves the impact on the assessment of deprivationism sensitive to the details of how the view is formulated. On something like Feldman's Total Life View, more or less all that matters will be the quality of the afterlife. According to all three Abrahamic religions, the quality of one's afterlife is sensitive to details about the events of one's life before dying, with one event able to make a massive difference in how the afterlife goes. For example, in some tellings of Christianity, the difference between the afterlife being on the whole a great good (and therefore death a great good) and being on the whole a great evil (and therefore death being a great harm) is a single mortal sin (or a single act of repentance). Likewise in Islam, the one act may be the different between a favorable or unfavorable reading of the book of deeds. With a less pronounced doctrine of damnation, things are less clear on Judaism. But even in Segal's intellectualist afterlife, the decision on which and how many necessary truths to learn makes a difference. In contrast, on something like the time-relative interest view, these vast swings are dampened by heavy discounting due to the transformative nature of death.

So it looks like whether dying is a harm to the one who dies on the supposition of an Abrahamic afterlife depends on the right way to spell out deprivationism. As we saw, many of the main arguments for Epicureanism are undermined by an afterlife. The fate of the final argument, Rubio's no-appropriate-type-of-harm argument, depends on the fate of deprivationism. If the Total Life View is correct, Deprivationism seems like a viable account of the badness of death. However, if the time-relative interest view is correct, modulo some questions about how severely afterlife goods and ills are discounted, the deprivationist situation may not change much. In that case, Rubio's argument survives the supposition relatively intact.

SECTION: ANTI-EPICUREAN ARGUMENTS REVISITED

Anna Brinkerhoff [2020] and Taylor Cyr [2016] have both offered arguments to the effect that, even in the case of an afterlife, death can be a harm to the one who dies. Both have a distinctly deprivationist flavor. Both are also explicitly only concerned with afterlives that are very good for those who experience them. This leaves out an important case: the case of someone who dies, and who - if they had kept on living - would have done something to change their afterlife from a very good one to a very bad one. Since this is one of the better Epicurean cases, its omission is significant. Nevertheless, since the Epicurean position says that death is not a harm to the one who dies, even the more restricted range of cases they each discuss are of interest.

¹⁶ Hillary Greaves presents a similar case in H. Greaves [2019]. "Against 'the badness of death'" in *Saving People From the Harm of Death*, ed. S. Gamlund and C. Solberg. Oxford: OUP.

SUBSECTION: BRINKERHOFF

Brinkerhoff draws a distinction between the goods of this life and the goods of the afterlife. Even if these goods are of the same type (e.g. pleasures, relationships, meaningful projects, desires satisfied), they are token-distinct. She uses the example of a project of teaching high school math to the students in a particular town at a particular time. Someone might have this particular life project, a project unavailable in the afterlife. Consequently, if the math teacher dies prematurely, they lose out on this particular life project. Likewise for the other goods of this life, such as significant relationships (which Brinkerhoff argues would be radically altered even if all partners in the relationship enter the afterlife). One side-effect of dying is losing out on these goods - the projects and relationships that death disrupts. It is important to note that these are not merely the losses of hypothetical future goods. They are goods actually possessed by the one who dies. This puts Brinkerhoff's view in the actual-loss family of views of the badness of death.

The main twist Brinkerhoff offers is to argue that even if dying trades the loss of these for better ones in the afterlife, it is still harmful. She draws a distinction between an event's being a harm, and an event's being a harm overall. For an event to be a harm, all it has to do is set back the victim's wellbeing in some respect. To be a harm overall, the net product of its effects on the victim's well-being must be negative. Thus, when the math teacher dies, they are harmed by the loss of their teaching project even if the net change in their well-being is positive because of the various afterlife goods they gain.¹⁷

The addition of a time-relative account of interest makes Brinkerhoff's view even more resilient. If the goods of afterlife are severely discounted, then perhaps dying and then going to paradise can be not only a harm, but an overall-harm, in her specific sense. But there is a flip side. As she herself suggests, if entering the afterlife is a transformative experience, a time-relative account of interest will render the loss of this life's goods less severe. The value of the specific projects and relationships lost must be discounted by loss of psychological connectedness between the pre and post afterlife self.

This has the net effect of making Brinkerhoff's view more vulnerable to an old Epicurean challenge than actual-loss views usually are. The first Epicurean argument asked us to identify when the dying person is harmed. Without an afterlife, this is an imposing challenge.¹⁸ With an afterlife, it is natural to say that the person who dies is harmed at the moment of dying. Because dying is not ceasing to exist, the no-subject problem does not come up. But if dying is transformative and interests are time-relative, it looks like the loss of earthly goods must be added to the dying person's well-being at a severe discount. This makes sense. In the light of revelations about the ultimate good and the eschatological structure of the world, once-valued projects and modes of relationship may well pale in importance.

SUBSECTION: CYR

In contrast, Cyr's strategy for finding a harm of death in the paradise-bound relies on complicating the afterlife. Cyr argues that three afterlife-hypotheses provide room for death to be a harm for the ones who die, even if the ones who die are going to paradise.

HYPOTHESIS-1: PURGATION: Interpolated between death and paradise is a potentially painful state of suffering to make the dead morally fit for paradise

HYPOTHESIS-2: INTERIM STATE: Interpolated between death and paradise is an experientially blank period of time

HYPOTHESIS-3: DEGREES OF GLORY: Paradise comes in levels, with better rewards for people with specific kinds of lives on earth

Each of these hypotheses functions in the same way: it adds some complexity to the structure of the afterlife in order to make sense of death depriving the one who dies of some good. In the purgation hypothesis, the one who dies could have worked on their character in the less-painful arena of this life rather than the more-painful purgatory.¹⁹ In the interim state hypothesis, living longer allows the one who dies to replace time as an experience-less blank with earthly experiences. In the degrees of glory hypothesis, the earlier death can deprive one of a chance at a higher degree of glory.

¹⁷ Brinkerhoff and Cyr disagree on exactly this point; Cyr concedes that replacing goods of this life with afterlife goods is not a harm

¹⁸ Some authors defend posthumous harms, e.g. Bradley [2009]. Some argue that the timing of death's harm is indefinite, e.g. Nagel [1970], while others like Feldman [1991] accept a timeless harm, a view christened atemporalism in J. Johanssen [2013]. "The Timing Problem," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*, eds. B. Bradley, F. Feldman, and J. Johanssen. Oxford: OUP. Some theorists allow death to retroactively inflict harm on the prior life, e.g. G. Pitcher [1984]. "The Misfortune of Death," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (2): 217-225.

¹⁹ Only some versions of purgatory have it as a less pleasant place than earth; Cyr's hypothesis mainly addresses those.

None of those works in a significantly different way from ordinary deprivationism. Hence, if the arguments against ordinary deprivationism (most notably Rubio's no-appropriate-type-of-harm argument) work, they also work against Cyr.

SECTION: THE WRONGNESS OF KILLING

Viewing death as a transformative experience has an impact on the Epicurean/anti-Epicurean debate beyond stalemating or undermining many of the Epicurean arguments. It also has the potential to solve an important problem for Epicureans. For while Epicureans want to say that death is not a harm to the one who dies, they are still generally reluctant to give up on the wrongness of killing. One option is to posit a right not to be killed. But this is not alone a satisfying response. With most rights, the existence of the right is somehow tied to the axiological status of the thing the right protects. We should ask no less in the case of life.

Fortunately, recognizing death as a transformative experience allows us to ground the right not to be killed in a more general right, and connect it to a harm. It is in general wrong to subject someone to a transformative experience without their consent. Personal transformation involves a remaking of the agent. To impose this on someone amounts to a thoroughgoing violation of their agency.

We can see this by looking at paradigm cases of transformative experience. One of the most important cases of a transformative experience is the experience of becoming a parent. Forcing someone to become a parent is rightly considered a serious violation of their agency. Another important case is gaining access to a new sensory ability, such as a deaf person receiving a cochlear implant. Forcing this on them would also be a severe agency violation. A third case: going to war, in particular into combat. The draft during war is, among other things, a violation of the conscripts' agency. So it is with dying when there is an afterlife.

It's important to note that this harm is only *prima facie* (and requires further exploration that is beyond the scope of this paper). Sometimes, the perfectly licit exercise of one's agency has as an effect someone else undergoing a transformative experience. So in a particular case of killing (or causing someone to die), the prohibition on involuntarily subjecting someone to a transformation must trade off against the other reasons at play. But it introduces a consideration that is unavailable if death is the end.

SECTION: CONCLUSION

We began with a question. What happens to the debate about the badness of death if we lift the assumption that dying is ceasing to exist permanently? To answer that question, we first looked at the afterlife as told by Abrahamic religions and argued that they make dying a transformative experience. We then looked at standard positions in the literature about the badness of death, showing where arguments failed to work or required modification. Our conclusion? Deprivationism is a viable account of the harm of death if reckoned by the Total Life view. But if it receives the Time-Relative Interest treatment, Rubio's no-proper-harm argument remains viable.²⁰

²⁰ Acknowledgements.

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