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ABSTRACT
This paper suggests that the Epicurean argument against death's badness can be much more easily defended if one endorses the view that lives and people are evaluated differently. Drawing on the work of philosophers Shelly Kagan and Stephen Rosenbaum, it is argued that death is not bad for those who are dead, but that it can be bad for the lives of those who are dead. Although death never harms the one who dies, it always affects the value of one's life.

KEYWORDS
Death; facts; Kagan; life; persons; philosophy; Rosenbaum

1 Introduction

Epicureans say that death is not bad for the one who dies because death – understood as 'being dead' – is the end of one's existence and can be associated neither with pleasure nor pain. As Epicurus famously puts it, ' … all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation … So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us … ' (Epicurus, 1940, p. 31). The usual response to this argument is that death is not bad for the one who dies because it is unpleasant to be dead, but because of what one loses by dying, and what one loses by dying is 'more of a *good life*' (Bradley, 2009, xiii).

It is not at all clear, however, that this response undermines the Epicurean argument. Even if one would have had more of a good life had one not died when one actually did, it still does not follow that death was bad for that person. If one dies young, it may be entirely appropriate to think of one's death as a misfortune and agree that one's life could have been much better had it lasted longer. But this is only to acknowledge, it might be pointed out, the effect one's death has on one's *life*, not *the person* whose life it is.

Since more of a good life is generally better than less of a good life, even those sympathetic to the Epicurean reasoning may concede that there is a sense in which death could be bad. Depending on the time of its occurrence, it may make one's life shorter and significantly decrease its overall value. However, to make that concession is not to concede that death itself could be bad for the one who died. After all, Epicurus did not say that death is nothing to our *lives*, but that death is nothing to *us*.

Let us then distinguish between the following two statements:

(1) Death is either good or bad for the life of a person who dies.
(2) Death is neither good nor bad for the person who dies.

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In this paper, I suggest that one can consistently accept both statements and that appealing to the distinction between (1) and (2) enables one to resist some well-known objections that are often raised against the Epicurean case.

Two preliminary remarks. First, I do not suggest that the acceptance of (1) and (2) is necessarily compatible with Epicureanism. It may as well turn out that Epicureans cannot consistently revise their view in this way and also remain Epicureans. Rather, my aim is to defend the Epicurean *argument* against the badness of death. It seems to me that the spirit of that argument can be preserved even if one abandons some underlying Epicurean assumptions. The Epicurean case need not be defended on Epicurean grounds. Second, the primary purpose of the Epicurean argument – as conceived by Epicurus – was to show that people should not fear death. However, the question whether death is bad for the person who dies is logically distinct from the question whether it is appropriate to fear death. For this reason, I will confine my discussion to the former question and leave the latter open.

The structure of my discussion is as follows. In section 2, I briefly present the account of well-being to which one may appeal when defending the distinction between (1) and (2). Here I rely on the views developed by Shelly Kagan (1992, 1994)) and Stephen Rosenbaum (2000, 2013)).[1] In section 3, I examine the two most prominent attempts to defeat the Epicurean argument and suggest that they can be interpreted as establishing the truth of (1), not the falsity of (2). I conclude the discussion (section 4) with some remarks about how the distinction between (1) and (2) preserves both the Epicurean and anti-Epicurean intuitions.

2 Life, persons, and death

If death is bad for the one who dies – it is usually claimed by those who reject the Epicurean argument – it is bad for the one whose life is good. Death is not necessarily bad for those whose lives are, for example, full of unbearable pain and suffering. However, it might be responded that the case against death's badness is grounded in an entirely different set of assumptions and that the questions about the quality of life are irrelevant. According to these assumptions, determining what makes a human life good or bad is not the same as determining what is good or bad for persons.

The idea that these two issues should be dealt with separately was first suggested by Kagan (1994). Kagan approaches the subject of well-being to show that '. . . it just might be one thing for a person to be well-off, and quite another thing for that person's life to be going well' (Kagan, 1994, p. 319). He provides compelling reasons that, as he says, 'open the door to the possibility that the standards for evaluating lives and persons differ' (Kagan, 1994, pp. 322–23).

In what follows, I will defend the Epicurean view in the context of the assumption that these standards indeed differ. As already noted, if one accepts this assumption, one could simply point out that the question of whether death could be bad for the person who died should not be conflated with the question of whether death can negatively affect one's life. But, before tackling death's badness, we should say more about the differences in the assessment of persons and lives.

2.1 Evaluating lives

For illustration, let us consider Sisyphus's life, whose whole existence revolves around rolling a stone up a hill. Richard Taylor (2016, pp. 23–24) imagines that gods have implanted in

Sisyphus the desire to roll a stone so that being engaged in this activity now becomes a gratifying experience for him. Applying Kagan's proposal to this case, we might say that Sisyphus himself is doing well but that his life is not good (see Kagan, 1994, p. 321).

Why think that his life is not good? Well, the fact that he feels satisfied with his condition, one could say, makes his life slightly better than his life would have been had this not been the case. However, this is still insufficient to alter the fact that his life is bad in virtually all other respects. Not only that rolling a stone is a completely meaningless activity, but, even worse, his life is empty of all value since it does not include any other activities besides that one. Furthermore, the fact that he is condemned to roll a stone for all eternity may not be a positive feature either.

The assessment of one's life involves taking into account various facts about that life and determining how they contribute to its overall value. Of course, it is quite challenging to provide an extensive list of relevant facts, but we already have an idea of what might be involved in such an assessment. For example, if a person spends most of her life in mild pain or depression, this fact is likely to be regarded as highly relevant for assessing how good one's life is. But to say that this fact is highly relevant is not to say that it should be regarded as decisive (although it could be crucial in some cases).

Even if one is not doing well, that does not yet have to mean that one's life is not good. It could still be that it contains some other desirable features that make it a good life overall. It could perhaps include close relationships, knowledge, the fulfilment of essential desires, various achievements that provide one's life with meaning, and many other things that one might consider valuable. And if so, the bad aspects of one's life (e.g., mild pain) would still be outweighed by its good aspects. It seems, then, that one's life as a whole could not be properly evaluated unless all these facts were taken into account.

That being said, it would be wrong to think that the assessment of a person's life should exclusively depend on whether that life contains more good features than bad ones (whatever these are). As David Benatar (2006, pp. 61–4) points out, our quality judgements should also be influenced by how these features are distributed across one's life. If we were to assess the quality of two lives in which the amount of good features were the same, most of us would be inclined to judge a life in which things gradually improve as being of higher quality than a life in which the opposite is true (cf. Velleman, 1993). Similarly, Benatar emphasises, a longer life is, other things being equal, better than a shorter one. Thus, if two lives contained the same amount of good things but differed only with respect to their length, we would once again think that a longer life is better.

To say that a longer life is *better* than a shorter one, as I use this term here, is to say that it is more 'choiceworthy' (Scanlon, 1998: 112; see also Lemos, 2014). Therefore, a life of higher quality is better or more choiceworthy than a life of lower quality. I will also talk about those features that make one's life more or less choiceworthy as being good or bad *for one's life* (cf. Kagan, 1994, p. 324).

2.2 Evaluating persons

But what is involved in the evaluation of persons? Returning to the example of Sisyphus, it is far from evident that the facts mentioned above are also relevant to the question of how Sisyphus himself is doing. For all we know, he enjoys the activity of rolling a stone more than anything else. It is his biggest desire to roll a stone, and this desire is fulfilled.

Since he is in no way affected by the meaninglessness of his life, it just seems difficult to understand how that makes him worse off. The same remark applies to other facts about his life, such as its eternity and the fact that his life story does not contain any other events except one single activity. Hence, why not think that all these considerations affect only the value of Sisyphus's life but not Sisyphus himself?

It might be replied that Sisyphus's situation is not relevantly different from, let us say, a person being enslaved. Namely, even if one is happy being enslaved, one is nevertheless made worse off being forced to live as a slave. Making a person live that way deprives her of various other opportunities and life's goods. In response to this line of thought, it should be emphasised that the example of Sisyphus, as conceived here, takes it as a given that Sisyphus is condemned to roll a stone for eternity. Once it is assumed that he cannot escape this fate, the question is whether gods have benefited Sisyphus by making him desire to roll a stone. And given his unfortunate circumstances, it seems plausible to say that he is better off if he remains content while performing this task (which in no way implies, of course, that enslaving someone is justified if an enslaved person would be happy being enslaved).

The claim that Sisyphus, as portrayed by Taylor, is doing well stems from the thought that a person has to be somehow affected to be benefited or harmed. It is precisely because of the change in Sisyphus's mental states – the change that occurred when gods implanted in him a desire to roll stones – that it is appropriate to think of him as being benefited. And to say that one cannot be benefited or harmed unless one is somehow affected is to suggest that nothing can benefit or harm a person unless it causes 'changes in the intrinsic state of the person', that is, 'the person's body or mind' (Kagan, 1994, p. 316). Thus, this approach is sceptical about the possibility of *purely* relational harm and benefit (i.e., the possibility that a change in relational properties *alone* can also be good or bad *for* a person) (cf. Kagan, 1994: 314; Papineau, 2012, p. 1092).

Those who adopt the approach described here do not have to claim that nothing can benefit or harm a person unless it affects one's conscious experience. Suppose a person acquires a deadly disease that she never becomes aware of because it has no symptoms. We may assume that the disease will significantly shorten this person's life and that she will die from it painlessly in his sleep. Despite her not being aware of it, there is a sense in which the disease also changes this person, so it seems correct to say that she is affected by it and therefore harmed.

The suggestion that lives and persons are evaluated differently derives its force from the idea that lives and persons differ in their nature. Kagan says that a person 'simply consists of a body and mind', but that life is 'something like a sequence of events or facts' (Kagan, 1994, p. 318). And if facts that make up one's life, Kagan notes, do not cause any changes in one's intrinsic states (i.e., one's body and mind), it is far from clear how they can make a person either better or worse off (see Kagan, 1994, pp. 319–20).

To think about what makes a person better-off is to think about what is good or bad *for* that person – it is to think about prudential values. But people's lives, as the outlined view suggests, are not evaluated merely in prudential terms. Here one focuses on the question of what makes a life *choiceworthy*, and a person's life could be choiceworthy even if it is not good for the person whose life it is.[2]

2.3 Evaluating death

Let us now turn to the issue of death's badness. As already mentioned, when Epicureans say that death does not harm the person who is dead, what they mean is that the state of being dead does not harm the person who is dead. Their opponents sometimes respond that there is nothing much controversial about this claim. Typical is the following observation by Fred Feldman:

> [T]o maintain the validity of the [Epicurean] argument, we would have to take [its] conclusion to mean that being dead is not *intrinsically* bad for the one who is dead. But this is no news. Most of us who think that death is bad for the one who is dead do not think that death is bad in itself. We think that death is bad for a person because of what it does to him or her; death is bad somehow indirectly by virtue of what it does to us. (Feldman, 1992, p. 134)

Notice how Feldman switches from the use of the phrase 'being dead' to the use of the term 'death'. He does not say that 'being dead is bad for a person because of what it does to him or her', but rather that 'death is bad for a person because of what it does to him or her'. But what Feldman means by 'death'? If he means 'being dead', then one may reasonably wonder how could the state of being dead do anything to a person who is dead. As I hope it will soon become clear (section 3.2), Feldman's view gains more plausibility when the term 'death', as he uses it, is taken to mean something other than 'being dead'. But what?

A convincing answer is provided by Stephen Rosenbaum (2000, 2013)). Rosenbaum suggests that the majority of those who, like Feldman, attempt to refute the Epicurean argument do not want to say that *the state* of being dead harms the one who is dead, but rather that the dead are harmed by *the fact* that they died when they did. More precisely, those who say that death harms the one who is dead, Rosenbaum argues, are actually saying that '*the fact* that a person dies at a particular time' harms the one who is dead (Rosenbaum, 2000: 154; see also, 2013, p. 154).

If so, those who share Feldman's approach not only seem to leave the Epicurean argument unaddressed (since that argument is only concerned with the state of being dead), but, as Rosenbaum points out, also face a challenge of showing how the facts that are completely disconnected from people's states could be good or bad for people (see Rosenbaum, 2000: 156–58, 2013, pp. 156–158).

Rosenbaum's insights are entirely compatible with Kagan's proposal. Not only that both of them sharply distinguish between the evaluation of facts and the evaluation of intrinsic states of a person, but both of them also raise doubt as to whether such facts – when they are in no way related to one's intrinsic states – could ever affect one's well-being.

Now, starting from the assumption that the evaluation of a person's life involves the evaluation of certain facts about that life and that the evaluation of persons (i.e., how well-off one is) involves the evaluation of their intrinsic states, it is possible to argue that death – understood as the fact that one dies at a particular time – can indeed be evaluated as good or bad, but only for people's lives, not for people themselves.

The fact that one dies at a particular time is just another fact about one's life, and if lives are made up of facts, then the idea that this fact could be good or bad for one's life does not seem controversial. But if one wants to go further and maintain that this fact could be good or bad, not just for one's life, but also for the person who lives that life, an argument is needed to justify that additional step. Namely, once we assess specific facts about one's life as good or bad in the sense that they make one's life more or less choiceworthy, it

remains to be shown in what way (if any) these facts could also benefit or harm the individual in question. That some story about that relationship needs to be provided becomes even more apparent if it is assumed that a person could remain utterly unaltered by those facts.

In light of all that, the two previously mentioned statements should be read as follows:

(1*) The fact that one dies at a particular time is either good or bad for the life of a person who dies.

(2*) Being dead is neither good nor bad for the person who dies.

As previously noted, one may happily agree that the amount of good and bad things in a person's life may largely depend on the time of a person's death. If death occurs too early, it can make one's life contain fewer good things, and if it happens too late, it can make one's life include more bad things. Similarly, it could be that an early death prevents one's life to develop into a meaningful one, or that late death makes one's life a worse story than it would have been had death occurred earlier. But, once again, none of this necessarily shows that death can be bad for the person who died.

In this context, I should also explain how my view differs from Rosenbaum's. Rosenbaum thinks that the fact that one dies when one dies can be bad for 'people's life narratives or histories' (Rosenbaum, 2013, p. 165). However, he also assumes that 'if something has value, it has value for some particular person' (Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 156). Therefore, according to Rosenbaum, if something is bad for a person's life narrative, it is also bad for a person. Contrary to Rosenbaum, it is here suggested that death is indeed good or bad for a person's life, but this does not entail that it is also good or bad for a person whose life it is.

3 Two anti-Epicurean strategies

In this section, I will examine the two most prominent strategies to defeat the Epicurean argument against the badness of death and suggest that they could be interpreted as establishing that death is bad for people's lives, not for people themselves. Let us say, perhaps somewhat inaccurately, that the proponents of the first strategy (or at least some of them) acknowledge that lives and persons have different natures but still insist that death can be bad for those who die. The second strategy proponents deny that lives and people should be evaluated differently and hence believe that whatever applies to people's lives equally applies to people.[3] However, it is possible to argue that the arguments put forward by the advocates of both strategies in fact establish the truth of (1*), not the falsity of (2*).

3.1. There is more to life than body and mind

The assumption of the Epicurean view, as standardly conceived, is that something can be considered harmful only if it affects one's experience. And since death is the end of all experience, it does not harm the one who dies. But this assumption, the objection goes, narrows down our ordinary usage of the concept of harm – it arbitrarily excludes all those events that do not affect one's experience at all but are nonetheless deemed harmful. Therefore, the advocates of the first strategy deny the assumption that one cannot be harmed unless one experiences that harm. Nagel says:

> There are goods and evils which are irreducibly relational; … *A man's life includes much that does not take place within the boundaries of his body and his mind*, and what happens *to him* can include much that does not take place within the boundaries of his life. These boundaries are commonly crossed by the misfortunes of being deceived, or despised, or betrayed. (Nagel, 1979: 6 – italics added)

Nagel here acknowledges that one's life typically includes things that exceed one's momentary experiences and hence is not limited to one's body and mind (cf. Kagan, 1994, p. 319). This is why he also thinks that one cannot acquire a proper understanding of the nature of harms and benefits if one focuses exclusively on a person's momentary experiences. Let us consider slightly modified versions of the three cases that are often mentioned in this context.

> *Betrayal*: A man mistakenly believes that he is loved and respected by his wife and friends. However, the truth is that his wife is having an affair and that his friends are spreading lies about him behind his back and are using him only to further their own interests. (Nagel, 1979, p. 4)

> *Island*: A young girl is killed on some remote island (from which no one outside can be contacted). Her mother never finds out about this tragic event because she dies from a heart attack several minutes later (J. Fischer, 2009: 7-8; J. M. Fischer, 2014: 137; McMahan, 1988, p. 34).

> *Stroke*: A successful mathematician starts to develop severe cognitive impairment after suffering a brain stroke. She soon becomes much like a 'contented infant' whose 'happiness consists in a full stomach and a dry diaper' (Nagel, 1979, pp. 5-6).

All three cases, it is argued, involve harms that are not experienced: the betrayed person is harmed by betrayal, the daughter's death harms the parent before she dies of a heart attack, and the stroke harms the mathematician. And once it is granted that harms need not be experienced to count as harms, it is possible to argue that death is one such harm. Even if the dead do not experience anything, that does not mean that death could not be bad for the dead. The badness of death, according to Nagel, consists in being deprived of all the goods that life has to offer.

Interestingly, one could agree that people in the above examples are harmed and still think that this concession does not threaten the Epicurean view. Even if harms need not be experienced to count as harms, it might be claimed, one can be harmed only if one exists. Since the betrayed person, the parent, and the mathematician all exist, it certainly makes sense to think of them as being harmed. But this requirement is not met in the case of death.[4]

However, this is not the only way in which one could handle the above cases. One may also argue that the problems mentioned above leave the Epicurean argument intact by appealing to the idea that lives and persons are evaluated differently.

To see this, let us consider *Betrayal* first. Nagel thinks that those sympathetic to the Epicurean argument might dismiss this example by insisting that betrayals are not bad unless they cause those who are betrayed to have unpleasant feelings. But to take that view, Nagel immediately responds, is to reverse the order of explanation. As he notes, ' … the natural view is that discovery of betrayal makes us unhappy because it is bad to be betrayed not that betrayal is bad because its discovery makes us unhappy' (Nagel, 1979, p. 5).

It is far from evident that advocates of the Epicurean argument need to disagree with Nagel. Of course, it is safe to assume that the man in the example would feel bad if he

knew that things in his life were not as they appeared to be. However, that does not show that betrayal cannot be regarded as bad unless the betrayed man is affected by it, only that betrayal cannot be regarded as bad *for* the betrayed man unless he is affected by it. Betrayals can be regarded as bad because they negatively affect the value of one's life. A life that contains loving, honest, and close relationships is, other things being equal, better or more choiceworthy than a life based on betrayal and deception. Moreover, if Nagel is right that one's life includes much more than one's body and mind, not everything that occurs within one's life is necessarily good or bad for the person who lives that life. Therefore, Nagel's example could be interpreted as establishing not that the betrayal is bad for this man but that it is bad for this man's life (see also Kagan, 1994).

A somewhat similar response can be given to *Island*. Once again, one could agree that the death of the young girl was bad but deny that it was bad for her mother. The sense in which her death could be regarded as bad should be familiar by now. Assuming that the daughter could have lived much longer than she had lived, her death could be regarded as bad because it negatively affected the value of her own life. But is it plausible to deny that her death was also bad for her mother? We may assume that the girl and her mother had a close relationship and that the mother cared very much about whether her daughter was healthy and alive. Even so, this does not show that the young girl's death was bad *for her mother* during that short period when she was still alive, but only that her death *concerned her mother* more than it concerned anyone else.[5] The girl's death would have been bad for her mother, one could keep insisting, only if it had affected her mother somehow, but that was not the case. It is not clear why such an interpretation of this case should be ruled out.

Let us now consider the last example. Since the mathematician in *Stroke* does not have any bad experiences and is also content with her life, it might seem that the defence of the Epicurean argument would require that one denies that the brain stroke was bad for the mathematician. But this should not be denied at all. According to the conception of well-being favoured here, one is not committed to the view that something counts as harmful only if it causes a person to have a bad experience. On the contrary, it makes perfect sense to talk about a person being benefited or harmed even in cases where the change in one's intrinsic properties does not produce any sensation. While it may be true that the mathematician feels good about herself, it is also true that a change occurred in her, namely, that something happened *to her*. Even if she is not aware of that, the stroke significantly altered her intrinsic state for the worse. But what makes her state worse for her? Since her bodily functions are now severely diminished, she can no longer meet basic human needs without help from others. Also, there is no reason for proponents of the Epicurean argument not to side with deprivationists here and say that the stroke changed the mathematician in such a way that she is now incapable of enjoying the goods in life. However, to make that concession does not mean one should also acknowledge that the same applies to the question of the badness of death. Insofar as death is understood as 'the state of being dead', death does not change a person's intrinsic properties.

3.2 Living a worse life

The second strategy advocates argue that one does not need to abandon the view that 'all good and evil consists in sensation' to refute the claim that 'death is nothing to us'. They

grant a tight connection between harm and experience but say that this does not exclude the possibility of death being harmful. Even if it is assumed that one cannot be harmed unless one's experience is somehow affected, they maintain, there are two different ways in which this requirement can be met.

A certain event (*E*) could count as being harmful either when (i) *E* involves a bad experience for a person, or when (ii) *E* deprives a person of a good experience. And this is precisely where, according to many, the Epicureans go wrong: they seem not to consider the possibility that death could be harmful in the sense of (ii), even without being harmful in the sense of (i). Death is harmful not because it makes a person experience something bad, but because it prevents a person from experiencing something good (cf. Broome, 1999, pp. 172–73).

The standard Epicurean response to this argument is that there is no harm in deprivation unless a person is somehow affected by it (i.e., unless it causes one to have a bad experience). More precisely, if what is described in (ii) counts as a harm, then it counts as such because it leads to (i). But even if there is a way to meet this response,[6] those who wish to refute the Epicurean argument are required to answer the following question: how could one be deprived of anything if one does not exist?

It is at this stage that those who oppose the Epicurean reasoning introduce a key distinction. Since they believe that the harm of death needs to be accounted for differently, they now argue that *E* can harm a person by (a) causing *a person* to be in a comparatively worse state, or by (b) making a person's *life* comparatively worse for her. While death does not harm a person in the sense of (a), it harms her in the sense of (b). Death is bad for the person who dies because – by depriving her of good future experiences – it makes her have a life which is worse in its entirety than the one she could have had.

Feldman (1992) supports this reasoning with an example. After imagining a boy who would have lived for another fifty years had he not died during minor surgery, he concludes that the boy's 'death is extrinsically *bad for him* because *his life* is on the whole intrinsically less valuable for him than it would have been if he had not died when he in fact died' (Feldman, 1992: 139 – italics added). Hence, to preserve the view that death is a harm, Feldman argues that death makes *a person* worse off by making his *life* less valuable *for her*. Obviously, Feldman rejects the proposal that lives and persons should be evaluated differently.

As it has already been pointed out, one problem with Feldman's approach is that it remains unclear what he means by 'death'. If he means 'being dead', then an explanation is needed of how 'the state' of being dead makes the boy's whole life 'intrinsically less valuable for him'. A similar difficulty arises if Feldman is interpreted as talking about the event of death, namely 'the event in which someone goes from living to not living' (Solberg, 2019, p. 91). This event takes place at the end of one's life, so, once again, it remains to be explained how it affects the period preceding it.

Assuming the event of death changes one's intrinsic properties, it can undoubtedly be regarded as bad for a person. But the question about the badness of death, it could be replied, is not whether *going* to not living (or non-existence) is harmful, but whether it is harmful to become nonexistent. As Rosenbaum puts it, '[w]hat people seem to think bad is not the moment of death itself, but rather the abysmal nonexistence of being dead' (Rosenbaum, 1993, p. 122).[7] Furthermore, there is a good reason to think that Feldman does not speak of death as an event. In his attempt to undermine Epicurus's argument, Feldman shows that he is well aware of what that argument purports to establish. He says: ' … Epicurus seems to be talking about the state of being dead – … the state that takes place when we finally cease to be

alive. This, he seems to be saying, is not bad for the one who undergoes it. Let us so understand the conclusion of his argument' (Feldman, 1992, p. 130). Therefore, if Feldman were trying to refute Epicurus's argument by establishing that *the event of death* can be bad for the one who dies, he would not address that argument at all.

In light of this, it is much more plausible to follow Rosenbaum and interpret Feldman as claiming that 'the fact that [the boy] dies at a particular time' makes his life less valuable for him. Let me make two points in support of this interpretation. First, note that those who believe that death can be bad for the person who died are usually challenged to say when the harm of death occurs. Feldman's answer to this challenge is that death is 'eternally' bad (or good) for the one who died (Feldman, 1992, p. 154).[8] More precisely, it is at all times true, he thinks, that the boy's life is intrinsically less valuable for him. This is true, he notes, even at a time when the boy did not yet exist. But now we see that it is not the boy's 'being dead' or the boy going from living to not living why his life is less valuable for him. If it is at all times true that the boy's life is less valuable for him, this is because it is a fact about the boy's life that it ended when it did. As Rosenbaum says at one point, '[f]acts, whatever they are, are commonly taken to be timeless or eternal' (Rosenbaum, 2000: 170 n., p. 8). Second, notice that Feldman's account includes an explicit reference to the time of a person's death. He thinks that death is bad for the boy because the boy's life would have been better for him had he not died *when* he did. Taking all this into account, it seems that Rosenbaum is correct to suggest that many deprivationists take 'death' to mean something like 'the fact that one dies at a particular time'.

All that being said, advocates of the Epicurean argument may happily concede that one's death can make one's life less valuable while at the same time rejecting the view that one's death can be bad for the one who died. To stick with Feldman's example, they do not need to deny that the boy's life would have been more valuable had the boy lived longer, only that the boy himself would have been better off had he lived longer.

To see this, let us assume that (i) some version of hedonism is the correct account of well-being, and (ii) that there are limits to the amount of pleasure a person can experience at any given moment. Under these assumptions, let us imagine a life of maximum possible pleasure that lasts thirty years. More precisely, imagine that the person whose life this is could not have possibly experienced more pleasure than she had experienced during those thirty years. But let us further assume that this person would have experienced even more maximum pleasure had she not died painlessly in her sleep when she turned thirty.

While it seems clear that her *life* on the whole would have contained more pleasure had she continued to live, it is far from clear that *she* would have been better off had she continued to live. For that would imply that she was worse off while living a shorter life. However, this is puzzling. Namely, although her life could have been much longer, her level of well-being – while she was alive – was at its maximum. If she had not died, her life would have been more valuable because it would have contained more positive value. But to say that this person's life would have been more valuable had it lasted longer, it might be responded, is not to say that it would have also been more valuable *for that particular person*.

4 Final remarks

In this paper I have adopted and supported Rosenbaum's diagnosis that the root of the disagreement between Epicureans and deprivationists lies in their different understanding of what is being evaluated. While Epicureans evaluate 'the state' of being dead, deprivationists

assess the fact that a person's death occurs when it occurs. When Rosenbaum's insight is combined with Kagan's suggestion that lives and persons are subject to different evaluative standards, I have claimed, it becomes possible to argue that death can be good or bad for a person's life but not for a person whose life it is.

Adopting the view that lives and persons are evaluated differently may also help us understand better why people care about the things they care about. Rosenbaum (2000, pp. 165–69) suggests that people are much more prone to avoid bads or choose goods that somehow affect them than they are to avoid bads or choose goods that do not affect them at all. For example, he says, one would rather choose to end one's life than continue to live a life full of suffering. He doubts 'that people would endure very much intense pain and suffering just for the sake of trying to avoid posthumous losses and related abstract bads' (Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 167). People tend to avoid their own suffering more than they wish to avoid all the bad things that their early death may bring about.

For these and similar reasons, Rosenbaum explains, even if something that does not affect us in any way can be good or bad for us, it is still the case that we attach more significance to things that *do* affect us. In that regard, even if there is a sense in which the fact that one dies at a particular time can be bad for the person who dies, it is still doubtful whether such evaluation of death is '*in any sense* relevant to human concerns' (Rosenbaum, 2000: 169 – italics added).

But Rosenbaum is wrong here. People sometimes care about facts that do not affect them at all more than they care about avoiding bads or choosing goods that do affect them. Consider:

> *Architect1*: You are an architect, and your latest bridge design brings you great fame. A week after your death, a design flaw causes the collapse of the bridge. Your reputation vanishes, and you posthumously become known as the most incompetent architect in your country's history.
>
> *Architect2*: You are an architect, and your latest bridge design remains completely unrecognized during your lifetime, but it brings you great posthumous fame. A decade after your death, you become known as the most inventive architect in your country's history.

I believe that, if confronted with a choice between these two lives, most people would choose *Architect2*. And assuming that this is true, the challenge is to explain that choice. The puzzle arises because it seems that you could not be affected by posthumous good (since you would no longer exist), and that provides a reason to doubt that the achievement of posthumous fame could in any sense be good *for you*. But if a person would not be benefited in *Architect2*, why would anyone choose *Architect2* instead of *Architect1*? Of course, it may also turn out that most people would choose *Architect2* because achieving posthumous fame could indeed be good for a person. Still, before we reach that conclusion, it is worth considering an alternative explanation.

And one possible explanation is that people sometimes care about their lives more than they care about themselves. They do not always care about what is good for them and are occasionally ready to risk or even sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of other things they value. These 'other things' may range from various pleasurable experiences (such as smoking or extreme sports) to the welfare of others (when a person, for example, exposes himself to the risk of being harmed to help a stranger). These activities are certainly not unusual, but they nevertheless endanger one's well-being.

Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that people could sometimes also be willing to risk their own well-being to enhance the overall value of their own lives. According to

the explanation favoured here, most people would choose *Architect2*, not because achieving posthumous fame would be good *for them*, but because that would make their *lives* more valuable and choiceworthy. It would not be good for them because they would no longer be alive, but it would be good for their lives.

Applying this to the question of death's badness, the evaluation of death – where 'death' is understood as 'the fact that one dies at a particular time' – may still be highly 'relevant to human concerns'. It is relevant to how one's life will turn out, and people are greatly concerned with their lives. For example, they may worry that their early death might prevent them from accomplishing their long-term goals, or worry about how their early death might affect others. All this suggests that endorsing the Epicurean argument is not incompatible with death being bad in the sense that is relevant to what people care about. And if so, the view that death is bad can be preserved even if death is not bad for the person who dies.

Notes

1. While the view defended in this paper significantly resembles and supports the view proposed by Rosenbaum, one will also notice that my whole discussion is indebted to Kagan's understanding of the nature of well-being and the ideas developed in his 1992 and 1994 papers.
2. Here I depart from Kagan's proposal. While I talk about lives being choiceworthy, Kagan seems to think that the evaluation of lives also falls under the topic of well-being (see Kagan, 1994, p. 324). The difference between the notion of a 'choiceworthy life' and a 'prudentially good life' is also discussed by Stephen Campbell (2013).
3. The best-known proponents of the first strategy are Thomas Nagel (1979) and John Martin J. Fischer (2009), J. M. Fischer (2014)). The second strategy is primarily associated with Fred Feldman (1992). These approaches are also discussed by Benatar (2017, pp. 98–102).
4. Some authors believe that this reply is not convincing. As J. M. Fischer (2014) observes, if one grants that harms need not be experienced, one should then *explain* why one thinks it is important that a person exists to be harmed. It seems that a possible response to the worry raised by Fischer could be that those who do not exist no longer have any interests, but I will not pursue this response here.
5. Kagan uses this distinction in a different context (see Kagan, 1992, p. 185).
6. Ben Bradley (2009: 71; 2012, p. 507) offers some interesting examples the purpose of which is to show that deprivation could be considered harmful even when it does not lead to bad experiences.
7. It should be noted that most philosophical discussions on the badness of death assume that death is the end of one's existence. See, for example, Luper (2009, p. 3).
8. Deprivationists themselves disagree on how to meet this challenge, so Feldman's answer is not the only possible one. For a brief overview of the proposed answers, see Benatar (2017, p. 112–113).

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