
International Association *for the* Philosophy of



Online symposium, July 26-29, 2021

Organized with the assistance
of Deakin University

Additional association information

<https://www.philosophyofdeath.org>

Twitter: @PhilDeathDying

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/philosophyofdeath>

Email to: info@philosophyofdeath.org

Event format

All symposium events will be online and available at <https://video.deakin.edu.au/channel/IAPDD+Symposium+2021>

Asynchronous (pre-recorded) presentations and commentaries

Jasmin Contos, "Termination in B-time?"

Comments: Joe Ulatowski

Abstract: Thoughts about death are often couched in temporal determinations, e.g. "Death is a long way off", "When I am present death is not", and so on. Given how tightly weaved the concepts of time and death are in ordinary and higher level considerations, an overlooked yet rather interesting question that merits discussion is whether the viability of the Termination Thesis (TT) is affected by the kind of theory of time that one adopts. That is, does a subscription to the A-theory or B-theory dictate whether one can hold the TT? The TT is a recurring concept in the literature on the nature of death. Briefly, the classical TT asserts that death is total annihilation. The temporal notions of cessation, simultaneity, and change are requisite for the TT. Thus, a B-theorist who wants to hold the TT must be able to accommodate and account for said notions in such a way as to allow for a formulation of the TT that significantly overlaps and serves the same function as the classical TT. This paper analyzes the possibility of such an understanding of the relevant temporal notions and the accompanying TT formulation, thereby exploring the viability of the TT in light of the B-theory. Despite an initial appearance of implausibility, a closer inspection of the features of the B-theory—in particular those of eternalism—and both contemporary and classical sources addressing the TT reveals a way forward for the would-be B-theorist TT proponent, which relies on a novel, particular interpretation of the TT. Furthermore, the preceding has implications for the greater question regarding the fit between A-theoretic versus B-theoretic models of time and the TT.

David Gurney, "The Ethics of Underground Deathing"

Comments: Andrea Asker

Abstract: While a few countries—in particular, Switzerland—have made it relatively easy for people suffering from intractable physical pain to end their lives peacefully and painlessly, most countries continue to make such acts of suicide difficult. And even Switzerland has been reluctant to extend its tolerance to people suffering from intractable psychological or emotional pain—or people suffering from intractable suffering through confinement (such as prisoners). As a result of this reluctance on the part of governments to allow painless suicide for those who reasonably desire it, many organizations have sprung up throughout the world that provide underground “deathing” or “exit” services. These organizations, such as Final Exit Network in the United States, provide their services at minimal cost (a one-time \$50 fee gets you lifetime membership with Final Exit Network, for example, and no additional fee is required for using their Exit Guides). Final Exit Network is considered an extreme organization by many—even those within the right-to-die community—yet even more clandestine deathing groups exist in the United States. While Final Exit Network purports to operate within the law (by providing only advice and presence, not assistance), there are documented cases where it is clear that Final Exit Network has violated the law. The same is true for the even more clandestine groups who operate with no administrative oversight. While these groups do, almost by necessity, violate the law—at least from time to time—I seek to answer whether they are violating any ethical principles in their pursuit of deathing. I shall argue that in places where painless and dignified suicide is not available for those who reasonably desire it, groups such as Final Exit Network are ethically justified in carrying out deathing even where the risk for error—both in terms of the people the organization helps (e.g., whether they truly reasonably desire death), and in the means the organization employs (e.g., when the agreed-to deathing procedure goes wrong and alternative means must be used). Under utilitarian principles, I shall argue, the risk of a misplaced deathing or a “botched death” is outweighed by the harm in forcing those who reasonably wish to end their lives to go on living.

David Lindeman, "A Comment on Benatar's 'Why it is Better Never to Come into Existence'"

Comments: Jasmin Contos

Abstract: In his essay 'Why it is Better Never to Come into Existence', David Benatar argues that it is better never to come into existence, though death is still a harm, even if sometimes the lesser of two evils; and that, while it is maybe permissible to have children, it is supererogatory not to. Pain is a harm and pleasure a benefit for those who exist ('existers', as he calls them). But according to Benatar, there is an asymmetry when it comes to the absence of pain and pleasure: Absence of pain is good, while absence of pleasure is neither good nor bad. From this Benatar concludes that not existing and not having pleasure is neither good nor bad, while not existing and not having pain is good. That is, the absence of pain is good for 'the non-existent'. The argument relies on a comparison between, on the one hand, presence of pain for existers versus absence of pain for the non-existent, and, on the other, presence of pleasure for existers versus absence of pleasure for the non-existent. Given the idea that absence of pain is good and absence of pleasure neither good nor bad, the comparison yields the conclusion that existing is not a 'real advantage' over not existing. Another comparison is between, on the one hand, presence of pain for existers and absence of pleasure for the non-existent and, on the other, presence of pleasure for existers and absence of pain for the non-existent. And again, given the idea that absence of pain is good and absence of pleasure neither good nor bad, the comparison yields the conclusion that existing is not a 'real advantage' over not existing. But if talk of 'the non-existent' is in fact empty, as I shall argue, and what is good or bad is good or bad for someone, we should say that the absence of pleasure and pain in cases where there is no one who could have pleasure or pain are not cases in which these absences are good or bad. Accepting as much, not existing is not a real advantage over existing. Benatar states that the absence of pain is not just not bad, as it would be if it were neither good nor bad, but also good. But he does not say for whom it is good. If we maintain that what is good is good for someone, we are free to reject Benatar's claim. It is true that the absence of pain is good for someone who exists, but it does not follow that the absence of pain is good for someone who does not exist. There are, of course, no such persons. Benatar admits a certain awkwardness in the language of his argument but is confident there are no serious metaphysical or semantic problems that would scuttle the argument. In my paper, I argue otherwise.

Rosalie Waelen, "Meaning and Morality: Considering Existential Harm in Life Extension"
Comments: David Lindeman

Abstract: ‘If you could live forever, would you?’ – This is not just a suitable question for philosophical reflection, it has gained ethical relevance too. Today we do not just live longer due to increasing welfare and developing healthcare, biotechnology might help us to live beyond the natural maximum lifespan. Like any new development, the ethical desirability of ever longer lives should be questioned extensively (as well as the economic cost of it). However, the leading proponents and developers of life-extension technologies are quick to dismiss all ethical objections raised against its development. They readily assume life-extension to be desirable, because aging and death are something horrible by definition. In my paper I will question this assumption – as I think all those involved in the life-extension debate should.

I will first give a brief overview of possible forms of life-extension as well as the common arguments for and against life-extension. Second I will point out that what I find troublesome in the debate around life-extension, the problem I aim to address in this paper, is that proponents depict death as the sheer opponent of life; as a threat that we are right to fear. I will then argue that death is not merely opposed to life, but at the same time a fundamental part of life. The prospect of death allows us to experience time and find meaning in our lives. Eternity should therefore be seen a threat to life, rather than death. I base this argument on Martin Heidegger’s famous *Being and Time*. In a third and final part I relate my argument to the four principles of biomedical ethics. If death is not (or not merely) something harmful, then taking away death is not necessarily an act of beneficence. In fact, if death has existential value, ripping people of the temporal horizon provided by death would be an act of non-maleficence.

In conclusion: the existential value of death should be part of the debate on the ethical desirability of life-extension.

Synchronous (live) presentations and commentaries

Schedule also available at: <https://bit.ly/IAPDD21schedule>

UTC	Brit Sumr	US East	US Pac	Melb/AEST	Mo Jul 26	Tu Jul 27	We Jul 28	Th Jul 29
11:00	12:00	7:00	4:00	21:00			N. Delon, <i>Procreative Asymmetry and Replaceable Animals</i> C: R. Southan (75 mins)	
12:00	13:00	8:00	5:00	22:00				
13:00	14:00	9:00	6:00	23:00				
14:00	15:00	10:00	7:00	0:00 (+1)				
15:00	16:00	11:00	8:00	1:00 (+1)			Y. Lavi, <i>Comments on the American Association of Suicidology's 2017 Statement "Suicide is not the same as 'physician aid in dying'"</i> (75 mins) C: D. Gurney	
16:00	17:00	12:00	9:00	2:00 (+1)	M. Piety, <i>What Boredom? Whose Immortality?</i> C: N. Delon (75 minutes)			E. O'hagan, <i>Mortality and the Goods of Grieving</i> C: K. Behrendt (75 mins)
17:00	18:00	13:00	10:00	3:00 (+1)		KEYNOTE: M. Pabst Battin, <i>Ending One's Life in Advance</i> C: N. Burakowska, M. Cholbi	A. Lancaster-Thomas, <i>A Fate Worse than Death? The Comparative Axiology of the Afterlife in Religious and Nonreligious Worldviews</i> (75 mins)	
18:00	19:00	14:00	11:00	4:00 (+1)	A. Buben, <i>The Dark Side of Desire: Nietzsche, Transhumanism, and Personal Immortality</i> C: H. Holmen (75 mins)			
19:00	20:00	15:00	12:00	5:00 (+1)				C. Fruge, "Value After Death" C: K. Egerstrom (75 mins)

20:00	21:00	16:00	13:00	6:00 (+1)	R. Altshuler, <i>Meaning, Death, and Nationalism</i> C: K. Berk (75 mins)		
21:00	22:00	17:00	14:00	7:00 (+1)			
22:00	23:00	18:00	15:00	8:00 (+1)	P. Stokes, <i>Selves, Persons and the Symmetry Problem</i> C: R. Kaufman (75 mins)		

Monday July 26

Marilyn Piety, "What Boredom? Whose Immortality?"

(Comments: Nicolas Delon)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
16:00	17:00	12:00	9:00	2:00 (+1)

Join Zoom meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/86488334115?pwd=Mnl4L3JpVUpSb0U0VExuemVjRnlQQT09>

Meeting ID: 864 8833 4115

Password: 10086205

Abstract: Bernard Williams argues in "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality" that "immortality would be, where conceivable at all, intolerable" (Problems of the Self, 82). Williams lays out two conditions he asserts are necessary in order for eternal life to be desirable. The first is that "it should clearly be me who lives for ever." The second is that "the state in which I survive should be one which, to me looking forward, will be adequately related, in the life it presents, to those aims which I now have in wanting to survive at all" (91). Most responses to Williams have focused on the second condition because this condition is more conspicuously related to the "tedium" in the title of the essay than is the first. One of my reasons for wanting immortality appears to be that I find my experiences interesting, which is to say that my aim in wanting immortality is the infinite repetition of my interesting experiences. The problem appears to be that any experience, when repeated infinitely, inevitably becomes boring, hence the second of Williams' conditions is inherently self-defeating. Donald Bruckner argues, contra Williams, that the fact that memories decay means that the unending repetition of what are arguably essentially the same experiences will not necessarily mean they will inevitably become boring ("Against the Tedium of Immortality," 2012), and, more recently, Ryan Marshall Felder argues that the "partial forgetting" of what he refers to as "non-essential memories" would enable us to enjoy experiences that would otherwise "have grown tiresome with age" ("Forgetting in Immortality," 2018).

This paper argues that such responses to Williams fail to appreciate the nature of the relation between Williams' two conditions. Any defense against the charge that infinitely-repeated experiences will inevitably become boring that is based on some concept of memory decay or forgetting will ultimately fail to satisfy the first of Williams' conditions. Memories are taken to be constitutive, in some sense, of personal identity. The qualification "in some sense" is important because ordinary levels of memory decay are a natural fact of human life and do not normally threaten our notions of personal identity. Extreme forms of memory decay, however, such as those associated with advanced cases of dementia or traumatic brain injuries are widely acknowledged to threaten our notions of personal identity. This paper argues that the levels of memory decay or forgetting that would be required in order to preclude immortality from becoming tedious will eventually erode any meaningful concept of personal identity that would be necessary to ensure, as Williams puts it, that it is "me who lives forever" (91, emphasis added).

Monday July 26

Adam Buben, “*The Dark Side of Desire: Nietzsche, Transhumanism, and Immortality*”
(Comments: Heine Holmen)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
18:00	19:00	14:00	11:00	4:00 (+1)

Join Zoom meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/87646542917?pwd=VFdBVnRUcjU5bjdUM0dUZ1NyNUJudz09>

Meeting ID: 876 4654 2917

Password: 77776999

Abstract: Nietzsche has become embroiled in two interesting 21st century debates that have to do with advancing technology and its impact on human life and its meaning/value. The first focuses on Nietzsche himself, and it is concerned with the extent to which his views line up with those of transhumanism. The second involves the not so blatantly Nietzsche-centric question of whether or not immortality, or radical life-extension, is desirable. Given that the desire for immortality, or at least some more feasible (but not so permanent) approximation of it, is strongly associated with transhumanism, it would seem that these two debates have some fairly significant overlap. And yet, they mostly carry on within their own little scholarly circles, avoiding any meaningful interaction. While the debate about Nietzsche’s proximity to transhumanism is likely to rage on no matter what, because of the many different points of contention concerning several key concepts in his work (most notably the Übermensch and the eternal recurrence), I cannot imagine how it would be possible to come to a reliable overall conclusion without first determining how he would respond to the immortality problem. Establishing what Nietzsche ultimately believes about (what has become) such a core transhumanist issue will go a long way toward providing an accurate assessment of how sympathetic he would have been to the transhumanist cause in general.

A. W. Moore claims that “for Nietzsche...a life in which life itself was not always at issue, that is to say a life in which death was not always a possibility, would be a standing invitation for meaninglessness to reassert itself. Here...there would be some sort of convergence between Nietzsche and Williams.” Along the lines of what several other immortality naysayers suggest, Moore believes that Nietzsche’s notion of creating new values requires a kind of riskiness and urgency that might go missing in genuine immortality. But even when talking about merely extended lives, however long they might last, Moore still sees in Nietzsche a Bernard Williams-esque concern. On his view, for both Williams and Nietzsche, the problem is that preserving one’s identity or character will inevitably preclude the novelty necessary to make life worth living. Although Nietzsche is not as concerned (as Williams) about boredom, it would be difficult to generate new interpretations and values continually, while remaining firmly attached to the person one has been. In Moore’s words: “Where allowing the subject to die, in favour of those other subjects, would open up new possibilities of narrative, new opportunities for sense-making, and new ways of defying nihilism, preserving the subject would impose restrictions and constraints on subsequent interpretation that would constitute an overall burden.”

I am not entirely convinced by Moore’s anti-immortality take on Nietzsche. Instead, I argue that Nietzsche’s views do not commit him to an all-encompassing disdain for immortality. However, his intolerance for immortality-seekers means that he might only be open to some of the more fringe understandings of transhumanism.

Tuesday July 27

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Margaret Pabst Battin, "Ending One's Life in Advance"
(Comments: Natalia Burakowska, Michael Cholbi)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
17:00	18:00	13:00	10:00	3:00 (+1)

Join Zoom meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/89508066090?pwd=Z3NxVzJUTUJ4aUhUZDhLOWtFRk9ydz09>

Meeting ID: 895 0806 6090

Password: 28259021

Tuesday, July 27

Roman Altshuler, "Meaning, Death, and Nationalism"
(Comments: Kiki Berk)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
20:00	21:00	16:00	13:00	6:00 (+1)

Join Zoom meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/83683434625?pwd=Y1Jzb1c4TWVCS3VvcTNRZGI4a2l6Zz09>

Meeting ID: 836 8343 4625

Password: 42462709

Abstract: Nationalism seems to owe some of the hold it has over the human heart to its relation to death and the meaning of life, but this connection remains largely unexplored. I will argue that nationalism speaks to the need for meaning in life and to the need to overcome the limits of one's own mortal existence, by building on three views of meaning. I will then argue that insofar as nationalism limits our influence, it is self-undermining as a means of seeking meaning.

First, consider Wolf's view of the meaning of life. On this view, meaning involves a subjective commitment to some project and that project's having an objective value. This objective component, on Wolf's view, captures the idea that a meaningful life must engage with something greater than ourselves. Nationalism is a natural fit for this idea. The nation is certainly something greater than the individual and, insofar as a nation is bound by a culture, it provides a horizon of significance against which our projects' value can be judged.

Second, several thinkers, Nozick and Morgenthau among them, have argued that life's meaning involves leaving traces, continuations of ourselves in the world. This idea responds to the thought that the meaning of life is threatened by death; leaving traces as a means of (partial) survival aims to overcome that limitation. Nationalism, again, fits well with this need to leave traces: it is only within the context of one's culture that most of one's achievements can be best appreciated.

Third, Scheffler's "Afterlife Conjecture" brings together aspects of the previous two views. Scheffler argues that the continuing existence of flourishing human life after our own deaths is a key background condition for our lives' containing value and meaning. Many of our projects are aimed at improving life, in some way, for future generations, whether as a primary or secondary aim. This view acts, in a sense, to reconcile Wolf's view with Nozick's: it matters that we engage with something that has value independently of ourselves, but that value typically depends to some extent on the continuation after us of living people, and not just any living people, it would seem, but ones who can take up and appreciate our projects. Nationalism, thus, may be taken to be a defense of the existence of such future generations against others, who may be far less interested in our projects.

Adapting Beauvoir's view on the meaning of life, however, I argue that all of these defenses of nationalism fail, at least insofar as they aim at protecting our culture from outside influence. If the boundaries of my life cannot by themselves grant me meaning—that is, if my finite existence provides too narrow a horizon for meaning—then the nation, limited to a single culture, has no reason to fare better. Beauvoir thus suggests an alternative: that we aim not buttress our national culture at the expense of others, but that we expand our projects such that they can leave traces outside our culture.

Wednesday, July 28

Nicolas Delon, "Procreative Asymmetry and Replaceable Animals"

(Comments: Rhys Southan)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
11:00	12:00	7:00	4:00	21:00

Join Zoom meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/83847934959?pwd=NUc3bU56RXXRwNzUySTErZU1hNmZkdz09>

Meeting ID: 838 4793 4959

Password: 33226967

Abstract: According to the Procreative Asymmetry, we have strong moral reason to prevent miserable lives from coming into existence, but at best very weak moral reason to create happy lives. This intuitive asymmetry has been widely appealed to. Yet it does not survive reflection when we hold fixed the relevant normative factors—when we can bring happy lives into existence without, say, infringing on parents' autonomy. As argued by Chappell (2017), our moral reasons to bring 'awesome lives' into existence are indeed strong, and we can explain away the intuitive appeal of the procreative asymmetry by resorting to a 'Deeper Intuition': that we have much stronger reason to benefit those who already exist than to benefit possible people by bringing them into existence.

The rejection of the asymmetry plays a pivotal role in the Replaceability Argument: that we may permissibly breed and later painlessly kill happy animals if they would not have existed otherwise, and we replace them with equally happy animals (Singer 2011; Višak 2013). The argument is used to motivate the permissibility of 'humane animal farming.' In this paper, I argue that this strategy backfires. Rejecting (or weakening) the procreative asymmetry leads to a different symmetry: the stronger the moral reason we have to create lives, the stronger the moral reason we have not to cut them short. The symmetry, I argue, applies to both deprivationism and preferentism about the harm of death. If we have moral reason to create 'awesome lives', we have all the more reason not to bring a premature end to them: their awesomeness contributes to explaining the harmfulness of their premature end. Thus, appealing to the symmetry to support Replaceability creates a new requirement: that we only create animals whose happy lives can be cut short without causing significant uncompensated harm to them. Replaceability only shows that we have (potentially strong) moral reason to breed animals who will not be harmed by premature death more than they will benefit from existence. But this is no easy task. On deprivationism, the happier the animal the graver the harm of a premature death, and recall: Replaceability implies happiness! On preferentism, we must ensure that no significant unfulfilled desires will carry over when the animal dies. That may be so, if animals lack categorical desires and categorical desires account for the harm of death (Belshaw 2013; 2016; Williams 1973). This means, however, that defenders of Replaceability either have a burden to discharge: establish that categorical desires are relevant (pace Bower and Fischer 2018; Bradley 2016; Timmerman 2016); or, if they assume deprivationism, they must presuppose that the harm of death is compensated for by the benefit of existence to different individuals. This, in turn, commits them to a controversial view of aggregation. Either way, Replaceability turns on controversial assumptions. This suggests that, if we reject the Asymmetry, we should also reconsider our conception of the harm of death for the happy animals we bring into existence.

Wednesday, July 28

Yael Lavi, *Comments on the American Association of Suicidology's 2017 Statement "Suicide is not the same as 'physician aid in dying'"*

(Comments: D. Gurney)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
15:00	16:00	11:00	8:00	1:00 (+1)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/89011562095?pwd=UGtIY2tuYmpUT1ZDUk04VVBjQVFIUT09>

Meeting ID: 890 1156 2095

Password: 25402041

Abstract: In 2017, in response to the legalization of aid in dying in several US jurisdictions, a statement was published by the American Association of Suicidology (AAS), convened and consolidated by Professor Margaret Battin. The statement asserts, based on 15 points of difference, that “‘Suicide’ is not the same as ‘physician aid in dying’ [PAD]” and concludes that “...such deaths [i.e., physician-assisted deaths or PAD] should not be considered as cases of suicide, and are therefore a matter outside the central focus of the AAS”. This policy’s practical implication seems to be that the members of the AAS do not have a professional obligation to prevent (legal) cases of PAD, as they do in cases of `suicide`. Moreover, there is no professional objection to their participation in the clinical evaluation process in these cases, as required by US law.

Nevertheless, as liberal as this may seem at first sight, these practical implications conceal a troubling bureaucratization and corporatization of end-of-life decisions. Even more troubling, they conceal an unsound moral stance that is derived from the erroneous distinction between PAD and suicide.

First, through textual analysis, I will point out the implicit assumption that stands at the heart of this distinction, according to which suicide is a matter of individual pathology and deficit. I will argue that there is a plausible reason to suspect this characterization’s validity due to built-in methodological distortions and biases (White et al. 2016, Hjelmeland 2017).

I will then briefly touch on two plausible (seemingly contradictory but perhaps complementary) lines of argument against the statement’s main thesis, which asserts that PAD can be rationally and objectively justified on medical, moral, and cultural grounds by the patient, his/her relatives, and society as a whole, while suicide contradicts all of the above. On the one hand, I will object to the irrationality premise, whether of the agent or of the act (here, I will mainly follow Cholbi’s [2019] argument); on the other hand, I will argue that the phenomenon of voluntary death should not and cannot be discussed in terms of rationality and objectivity, and, hence, the application of these standards is at least problematic, if not a categorical mistake (Améry 1999, Cowley 2006, Kulp 2014).

In this integrated account, the weakness of the distinction between PAD and suicide suggests that the AAS statement may draw a bullseye around the arrow. This pragmatic, scientific distinction serves not only to protect the AAS from malpractice accusations, but also, more importantly, to bypass the existential dilemma (and thereby also the moral and political dilemmas) that would have arisen if suicide and PAD were considered the same—a sameness that would undermine the AAS’ *raison d’être*.

Wednesday, July 28

A. Lancaster-Thomas, “A Fate Worse than Death? The Comparative Axiology of the Afterlife in Religious and Nonreligious Worldviews”

(Comments: A. Boudin)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
17:00	18:00	13:00	10:00	3:00 (+1)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/83954511517?pwd=N3dJYVpkaUNBcHdoUDArRSs0bWFqZz09>

Meeting ID: 839 5451 1517

Password: 82472618

Abstract: Often philosophical research into trends of religious belief tends to focus on existential questions such as whether God (or gods) exists. Recently, though, the discussion of the value of religious and nonreligious worldviews has been developing at a rapid pace. In the last few decades, philosophers have begun to examine, compare, and contrast the value of the existence or non-existence of God (or gods). Originally proposed by Thomas Nagel, the belief that God’s existence makes things worse than they would otherwise be (anti-theism) has recently been developed by several philosophers. Anti-theism is generally based on the perceived incompatibility between God’s existence and particular personal preferences which, when met, make life better. Philosophers endorsing anti-theism have proposed candidates that they consider ‘good-making features’—features that anti-theists claim are compromised by the existence of God. Such candidates include privacy, autonomy, objective independence, meaningful life, and ability to understand the universe. Similarly, some anti-theists have suggested ‘worse-making features’ (or axiological downsides) entailed by God’s existence, such as moral subservience and cosmic justice. On the other hand, some philosophers argue that there are certain good-making features that are compromised by God’s non-existence, adopting the view that God’s existence makes things better than they would otherwise be (pro-theism). Potential features of this type include eternal life and cosmic justice. What has not yet been undertaken in this exciting area of research is a comprehensive comparative exploration into the axiology of different eschatological views in religions and nonreligions. In this paper, I argue that the value of different religious and nonreligious afterlife options is contingent on the personal preferences one holds. In other words, the answer to the questions, “What would you prefer to happen to you after death?” and “What is the best thing that could happen to one after death?” depends entirely on the preferences they have in life. I consider various personal preferences (including the importance one places on solitude, whether one is an existential optimist or pessimist, whether one considers a soul necessary for personal identity, and what moral status one believes they have) and their compatibility with several prominent theories of the afterlife. My aim is to identify the relative axiological value of each view (reincarnation, rebirth, heaven, hell, and oblivion) based on personal preferences. I also distinguish between personal antitheism/protheism and impersonal antitheism/protheism in relation to the value of the afterlives considered. One might, for example, be pro-oblivion for themselves but hold that in general it would be better if oblivion were not a universalized afterlife for all mankind.

Wednesday, July 28

Patrick Stokes, "Selves, Persons and the Symmetry Problem"

Comments: Rik Kaufman

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
22:00	23:00	18:00	15:00	8:00 (+1)

Join Zoom meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/82755040470?pwd=Yjlob1BmOXUvK3NNMVVCaFF6c3hiUT09>

Meeting ID: 827 5504 0470

Password: 19112185

Abstract: An important response to the (neo-)Lucretian symmetry argument, offered by Frederik Kaufman, insists that prenatal nonexistence differs from posthumous nonexistence because we could not have been born earlier and still have been the same 'thick' psychological self - and it's that thick self, not a mere metaphysical essence, whose survival we care about. As a consequence, we can't properly ask whether it would be better for us to have had radically different lives either. "Would I have been better off if I'd been kidnapped and raised in an Inuit village?" turns out to be incoherent, for the imagined Inuit would not be me in the sense of 'me' I actually care about. Against this, John Martin Fischer insists we can form preferences as to which 'thick' (psychological) self our 'thin' (metaphysical) self would be better off 'associated' with. I argue that these discussions draw the right distinction, but do so in the wrong place: understanding the 'thin' self phenomenally instead of metaphysically better illuminates how we relate to and evaluate our possible alternative lives. Drawing this distinction between metaphysical 'persons' and phenomenal 'selves,' I claim, in fact throws many of the standard disagreements in Philosophy of Death in a new light.

Thursday, July 29

Emer O'hagan, "Mortality and the Goods of Grieving"
(Comments: Kathy Behrendt)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
16:00	17:00	12:00	9:00	2:00 (+1)

Join Zoom meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/85791630293?pwd=aEdKblBWeHZSa291YThoVGZockFuUT09>

Meeting ID: 857 9163 0293

Password: 75604831

Abstract: What is good about grief and grieving? Given that even when grieving unfolds with composure, it never rewards the griever with what has been lost, its value seems opaque. The question of how grief might be good depends on what grief is. Should grief be understood episodically, as an emotional response to loss, or should it be seen as an inevitable kind of suffering within a lifespan? My discussion draws on a recent debate in the psychology of bereavement concerning the characterization of depressive and dysfunctional episodes after significant personal loss. Should normal grief be thought of as a mental disorder? Stephen Wilkinson (2000) has argued that if normal grief fits standard definitions of mental disorder, then it makes sense to classify and respond to grief as we respond to other disorders. I argue that "normal grief" should not be so defined. Rather, grief should be understood contextually, within the course of a human life, as a complex emotional response to personal loss; it is a characteristic form of suffering that offers an opportunity for practical reflection.

I will argue that one of the goods grief affords lies in its capacity to help us to come to terms with human mortality. Death reveals to us the finiteness of our own lives and the lives of those we love, and grieving presents an opportunity for the deeply felt recognition of our finite condition. Awareness of this sort has an obvious payoff – we are less likely to get lost in the trivial details of life and more able to appreciate life while it is available to us. In making my case, I deny that grief has a single good, and thus allow for pluralism about the goods of grief.

Turning to the question of how grief might be good for us, I argue that the question of grief's goodness is not best framed by considering how the pains of grief can be vindicated, as has Michael Cholbi (2017, JAPA). The complexity and richness of the goodness of grief cannot be fully captured by this approach. Moreover, the so-called pains of grief and the grieving need to be distinguished. While in sympathy with Cholbi's view that grief's goodness lies in its role as a source of self-knowledge, I argue that this claim is too narrow. I make my case by considering how grieving might unfold (well or badly) over the course of a life. Understood as an activity within the course of a human life, grieving well has the potential to be life-enriching, in a manner stressed by many philosophers of antiquity. This potential good is lost when grief is conceptualized overly narrowly, as having a single object (Cholbi, 2017, PPR) such as the lost relationship. I argue that grieving can be done well or badly, and part of its goodness resides in the capacity to use episodes of grief over the course of one's life to come to terms with mortality.

Thursday, July 29

Christopher Frugé, "Value After Death"

(Comments: Kirsten Egerstrom)

UTC	Brit Summer	US East	US Pac	Melbourne/AEST
19:00	20:00	15:00	12:00	5:00 (+1)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://deakin.zoom.us/j/82653812001?pwd=a0xKMmFPS3JqcnIxWDFNak83WnB5QT09>

Meeting ID: 826 5381 2001

Password: 59778895

Abstract: Does our life have value for us after we die? Despite the importance of such a question, many would find it absurd, even incoherent. Once we're dead, the thought goes, we are no longer around to have any wellbeing at all. However, in this paper I argue that this common thought is wrong. In order to make sense of some of our most central normative thoughts and practices, we must hold that a person can have wellbeing after they die. I provide four arguments for this claim on the basis of our attitudes toward the dead, continuity with aggregation of wellbeing in general, considerations of postmortem harms and benefits, and the ethical significance of death. I offer a conception of wellbeing that underwrites this view, according to which the subject of wellbeing after death is the person who exists as an abstract object.