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International Association *for the* Philosophy of



IAPDD conference 2022 (Melbourne)  
CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

**Kiki Berk, “Beauvoir on Death and Finitude”**

Simone de Beauvoir’s views on death and finitude have received relatively little attention in the literature despite the fact that she devotes so many of her writings to them. Works of hers that focus on these themes include: *The Coming of Age*, a massive anthropological and philosophical treatise on old age; *A Very Easy Death*, a highly personal memoir about her mother’s death; *A Farewell to Sartre*, a first-hand account of Sartre’s last days; *All Men Are Mortal*, a novel about the curse of immortality; and *The Prime of Life*, an autobiography in which death and aging are recurring themes. Indeed, these many writings on death seem to suggest an “obsession with mortality,” as the Beauvoir scholar Elaine Marks put it.

It is no secret that Beauvoir holds a highly negative view of all aspects of our mortality. She calls death “an unjustifiable violation” and old age “life’s parody.” She writes of dying that “nothing on earth could possibly justify these moments of pointless torment,” and of immortality that “whether you think of it as heavenly or as earthly, if you love life immortality is no consolation for death.” But why does she hold these views? What reasons does she give for being so pessimistic about our mortality?

In this paper, I discuss Beauvoir’s reasons for thinking that death, dying, old age, and immortality are bad. Surprisingly, Beauvoir gives different reasons for the badness of each of these items. In this paper, I disentangle these arguments and present them each in a way that should be understandable to philosophers in the “analytic” tradition. I also spend some time trying to evaluate these arguments, which are not all equally convincing. In addition, I attempt to rank the relative badness of these four items—death, dying, old age, and immortality—with respect to each other. Which of them is the worst? Which of them is bad but not as bad as the others? Finally, I compare and contrast Beauvoir’s views and arguments about each of these items with Sartre’s and argue that they diverge much more than might be expected. In particular, Beauvoir and Sartre disagree about the badness of old age, the badness of immortality, and whether death deprives life of meaning.

As Beauvoir's treatments of death and finitude are currently understudied and underappreciated, this paper fills in a lacuna in Beauvoir scholarship and opens up her work to the thriving field of contemporary analytic philosophy of death.

### **Samantha Brennan, "Gender Inequality and the Badness of Death"**

In recent years both feminist philosophers and their critics have drawn attention to inequalities in the lifespans of men and women. In the United States, for example, life expectancy is 77 years for men, and 82 years for women. What are we to make of this five year difference?

John Kekes takes up this question in "A question for egalitarians" in *Ethics* (107:4: 658-669) and David Benatar continues the conversation in his book *Second Sexism*. Both philosophers press the point that if men, on average, lead shorter lives than women, and inequality is a serious moral concern, then we ought to see a push on ethical grounds to lengthen the lifespans of men. The life-gap ought to be top of our ethical agenda. Both philosophers criticize feminists working in ethics for not taking this lifespan gap between men and women seriously.

Meanwhile, feminist philosophers such as Christine Overall in *Aging, Death, and Human Longevity: A Philosophical Inquiry* point to the difference in life span but instead of focussing on the extra number of years women live, she looks at the quality of those years. Women may live longer than men but often spend their final years in poverty and ill health. Which matters from the viewpoint of assessing wellbeing across the life span, total years lived and total wellbeing or the average wellbeing? The extra years may add more to the total but they bring down the average. We also have a preference for upward sloping patterns and so even if the total is the same, we may prefer a life in which wellbeing goes up and up rather than one that ends in a downward slope.

Finally, what's the connection between measuring lives well lived and making comparisons between them and the badness of death? If women, on average, are leading worse lives than men, on average, and the deprivation account of death's badness tells us that death's badness relies on the amount of good of which one is deprived, women's deaths will be less bad than the deaths of men. But it surely seems perverse to conclude your death is less bad because you are leading a diminished life. I also suggest that the deprivation account needs to be sensitive to different kinds of goods, not just the amount.

In conclusion, both the male egalitarians who worry about the lifespan gap between men and women and the feminists who lament the ways in which women's lives often end, miss out on some interesting questions raised about equality, death's badness, and how to rank moral concerns.

### **Mattia Cecchinato, "How to Quasi-Survive through Future Generations"**

It is commonly said that having descendants is a way of extending one's existence beyond one's own lifetime. Many similarly believe that they may in some sense survive death if future generations will embrace their ideas, read their books, advance their projects, or continue their traditions. Is there any justification for this claim, or is it an instance of wishful thinking? Will I live on through future generations?

Some philosophers argue that I might. Mark Johnston (2010) maintains that good people can genuinely survive through the 'onward rush of humanity'. Roman Altshuler (2017, 2021) contends that the causal connections between one's mental states, and those of future people, allow for the continuation of one's existence. But others deny the authenticity of this kind of survival. For instance, Samuel Scheffler (2013) believes that the persistence of our descendants does not offer a literal afterlife.

In this talk, I investigate this question from a different, and more moderate, theoretical perspective. Although we might not genuinely live on through future generations, I propose that they can be our continuers by preserving much of what-matters in our survival, i.e., the relation that instantiates our prudential concern. I conclude that, if humanity successfully survives existential risks—such as those posed by climate change, pandemics, and nuclear weapons—we will quasi-survive through future generations, where by ‘quasi-survival’ I mean the preservation of the what-matters relation without identity.

Quasi-survival would be significant for two reasons. First, it is ordinarily claimed that that we have moral grounds to be concerned about future generations. But if we may obtain quasi-survival through future people, we also have significant prudential grounds to worry about them. Secondly, death is usually considered to be a bad thing, something to avoid. But if a lot of what-matters in survival will be preserved across generations, then we would have reason to be less concerned about our demise—at least as long as humanity persists. Death might be less bad than we thought. Although not immortality, this could be the next best thing: a long longevity of what-matters to us.

Examining this unexplored topic, I distinguish two strategies for quasi-survival. The Continuity Strategy contends that future generations will be connected to us in a way that preserves a significant degree of psychological continuity. This strategy is a consequence of The Widest View of What-Matters, favoured by Derek Parfit, where any causal connection between mental states can preserve what-matters. An unreliable or indirect cause may preserve the object of my prudential concern. For instance, suppose I step into an unreliable teleportation machine that destroys bodies and scatters all their atoms across the universe, but, despite extremely low probability, all my atoms are coincidentally teleported in the correct order, making a duplicate of me. My duplicate would still have all that matters to me. On this view, what-matters can also hold interpersonally. An indirect causal interaction between my mental states and those of others, such as exchanging thoughts through discussions, is sufficient to reproduce some of my mental contents into other people. Crucially, I may reproduce my existing psychological traits into people who will live beyond me. These people may then reproduce these same traits into their successors, and so forth. The Continuity Strategy states that a legacy of what-matters will persist through generations, proportionally to the amount of intergenerational psychological continuity existing between oneself and one’s descendants.

There is also another strategy to obtain quasi-survival. One might contend that, for prudential purposes, no causal connection is necessary to tie together the relevant mental states. Instead, we should replace the causal requirement with a similarity requirement, according to which what-matters is the existence of psychological characteristics qualitatively similar to ours. This similarity relation comes in degrees, and it is reasonable to expect future people to resemble us in many mental respects. Call this The Similarity Strategy to quasi-survive through future generations. Its main argument is that, given the enormous number of lives that will populate the future, it is overwhelmingly likely that there will be some people who, to varied extent, will be psychologically similar to us. Future people might be continuers of our mental contents by embracing our beliefs, sharing our desires or moral character. If our mental life will recur in the future, then, with our death, not all that matters is lost. In this talk, I put forward arguments for these two strategies and test whether they are successful.

### **Tom Cochrane, “The Will to Live and the Fear of Death”**

The will to live is a pervasive desire to carry on living. We can identify it as that which spurs individuals to endure in extremely debilitating situations, and also as that

which is lost when individuals become suicidally depressed. In several studies, individuals have also been able to quantify their will to live, allowing researchers to monitor its rise and fall and to positively correlate it with survival rates. These considerations indicate that the will to live is a definite drive, and also that it is sensitive to the individual's reasons.

I am most interested in the relationship between the will to live and philosophical attempts to become reconciled with mortality. Building on theories of emotion, I argue that we can understand the fear of death as triggered by a *de se* mode of thinking about death which comes into conflict with the will to live. A strong will to live will always resist arguments that death is not a harm, regardless of their rationality. But if we can voluntarily diminish our will to live, then we can potentially ameliorate the fear of death.

This suggestion then raises two problems. The first is whether the will to live can be voluntarily diminished. I argue that we have partial control in this regard. This is because there is not much reason to think that the will to live is some kind of foundational drive (as Spinoza or Schopenhauer might have it). Rather, the will to live is more summative in character and thereby sensitive to fairly mundane desire adaptations. In addition, although certain basic desires are automatic, it takes imagination and reasoning to extend the reach of these desires beyond the immediate future, and this is something we can control.

The second problem is that a declining will to live may result in a general malaise or condemnation of the world (as we see in depression). As such, it may be preferable to resist the decline of one's will even if it leads to the fear of death. I argue that a diminished will to live is compatible with focusing upon more immediate goods and the aesthetic character of the world, such that a sense of the world's positive value is maintained.

### **Courtney Hempton, "Cause of Death: The Obfuscation of 'Voluntary Assisted Dying'"**

In an historic transformation of the governance of dying and death, Victoria is the first state in Australia to institute 'voluntary assisted dying'. As defined by the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 (Vic), voluntary assisted dying entails "the administration of a voluntary assisted dying substance" (p. 8), "for the purpose of causing a person's death" (p. 9). Despite the explicit purpose of voluntary assisted dying to cause death, voluntary assisted dying will not be registered as the 'cause of death'. As specified in the legislation, the cause of death must be recorded in the state's 'Register' of births, deaths, and marriages as "the disease, illness or medical condition that was the grounds for a person to access voluntary assisted dying" (s 119); voluntary assisted dying will be recorded as the 'manner of death' (not the cause), and voluntary assisted dying will not appear on the 'death certificate'. *Prima facie*, recording the cause of a death resulting from access to voluntary assisted dying as an 'underlying condition' is inconsistent with both the stated purpose of voluntary assisted dying, and otherwise adopted approaches to recording cause of death in the state of Victoria.

In this paper, I argue that registering cause of death in the context of voluntary assisted dying as an 'underlying condition' functions to obscure voluntary assisted dying as a state-sanctioned medical technique explicitly intended to cause death. I contend the state's approach to cause of death is contingent on a medico-legal category of 'the dying'; demarcated by the eligibility criteria for access to voluntary assisted dying.[1] I argue the category of the dying operates such that being 'already dying' serves to render a person eligible to die by means of voluntary assisted dying (i.e. terminable), while simultaneously being exploited to negate voluntary assisted dying as a cause of such (self-)termination. To establish this claim, I will compare cause of death in the context of voluntary assisted dying to the state's usual approach to recording cause of death, considering different types of death ('natural' and 'external'), and in terms of causation, considering the mechanism and intent of voluntary assisted dying.

Recording cause of death in the context of voluntary assisted dying as an ‘underlying condition’ fails to distinguish voluntary assisted dying as an external type of death, and as a mechanism that intentionally causes death; attributing death to a necessary underlying condition conceals the intentions and actions of the person who died, the medical practitioners who aided the person to die, and the state which permitted the person to access voluntary assisted dying. Overall, the state’s recording of cause of death in the context of voluntary assisted dying problematically obscures the practice of voluntary assisted dying, and significantly transforms medico-legal discourse regarding intentionally causing the death of ‘the dying’.

### **Noam Hillel and Guy Keidar, “Suicide and Empathy”**

In this paper, we will deal with the question of suicide from a social obligation perspective. We will claim that suicide is a natural right, and that the state institutions have no justification to prevent it. We argue that empathy is necessary for taking any stand with respect to a person’s decision to suicide. Since state institutions are inherently non-empathic, we will conclude that they lack moral basis to reason with this issue.

The argument rests on two assumptions, defended in two phases. In the first phase we argue that subjects have a right to die. We extend Mill’s and Cholbi’s views on this issue, using a comparison to a case study of euthanasia to do so. In the second phase we argue that intervention in all-things-considered rights (i.e. rights that are not defeated by other people’s rights or by the subject’s duties) requires empathy; The psychological ability to embrace the individual’s point of view. In light of these two phases, we argue that institutions that in principle cannot take individual points of view into account (states, for example), lack moral grounds for intervening in typical cases of suicide.

We extend our insight about empathy to cases of interpersonal relationships, and argue that empathy is not merely a necessary condition for intervention, but also the final arbitrator with respect to the nature of the appropriate response. This is especially so in cases in which other forms of reasoning exhaust themselves. We believe we tend to regard suicide as an unacceptable case due to a problem of empathy, and not due rational reasons.

Our conclusions about empathy have important practical implications: First, the understanding that the suicide matter should be transferred to individual-personal care, rather than the state. Second, the state general approach on the matter is irrelevant.

### **Heine Alexander Holmen, “Death and the Consolation of Philosophy”**

Should philosophy reconcile us with death? Modify our fears or ease anxieties? Many philosophers say “yes”. Indeed, quite a few historical figures consider such reconciliation as a constitutive aim of philosophy in general. After all, philosophy aims at wisdom and the latter is inconsistent with being fear of dying. In light of such thoughts, Socrates in the *Phaedo* defines philosophy as having “the one aim [...] to practice for dying and death”. Michelle de Montaigne later echoes his definition when he defends the idea that “to study philosophize is nothing but to prepare one’s self to die”. Schopenhauer even declares death as “the real inspiring genius or Musagetes of philosophy” and claims “all religions and philosophical systems are directed principally to this end”: to “console us concerning death”.

Despite significant differences between these philosophers, they take seriously the idea that philosophy has a consolatory function and that its aim is therapeutic: to heal our suffering and reduce fear of death. Consequently, they came up with considerations with that intent. The most famous is perhaps the argument that Epicurus gives:

“[A]ccustom yourself to believing that death means nothing to us, since every good and every evil lies in sensation; but death is the privation of sensation. [...] This, the most horrifying of evils, means nothing to us, then, because so long as we are existent death is not present and whenever it is present we are nonexistent. Thus it is of no concern either to the living or to those who have completed their lives. For the former it is nonexistent, and the latter are themselves nonexistent.”

Whatever the force is to such arguments, many philosophers today are sceptical. According to these therapy-sceptics, all a philosopher can come up with qua philosopher are arguments, theories and rational considerations and they are not the right sort of tools for therapy. As Kieran Setiya puts it: “[Y]ou cannot argue someone out of being afraid to die”. His point is that if fear already has a grip on you, “philosophy comes too late” since “the fear is in one’s bones”. Fear appears unassailable by reason. Accordingly, he rejects these therapeutic goals as a part of the philosophic enterprise.

In my view, this is too pessimistic. For one thing, it is at odds with the ancient ideal of a practical and compassionate philosophy existing for the sake of us: an enterprise whose ambition is to address life – our deepest wants, fears and perplexities – and improve it through thought and reflection. Moreover, I think this scepticism springs out of some dubious assumptions: firstly, that the nature, repertoire and scope of philosophy is narrowly restricted to arguments; secondly, that emotions are insensitive to reason. In what follows, I will therefore pursue the dual strategy of arguing, on the one hand, that there is more to the repertoire of reason and philosophy than arguments; and, on the other, that emotions has enough of a rational and cognitivist aspect to make them modifiable by reason.

### **Rik Kaufman, “Death, Deprivation, and a Sartrean Account of Horror”**

Assume that we exist as conscious beings; assume that death is the permanent extinction of that consciousness. Is death—not dying, but death—bad? Those who think so often appeal to some version of the Deprivation Account. If death deprives someone of life that she would have enjoyed by not dying when she did, then it at least can be (extrinsically) bad, since it prevents more of what is (intrinsically) good. Despite the many difficult questions it raises, the Deprivation Account seems intuitively plausible, as its widespread acceptance attests.

Since death is (or can be) bad, the fear of death is not irrational, or so one might then proceed to argue. However, the mere deprivation of good does not readily explain the intense emotional reactions many people have at the prospect of their own deaths. Here we are dealing with a range of powerful negative emotions such as horror, dread, and anxiety, that seem to go beyond the simple fear of something bad.

Thomas Nagel and Samuel Scheffler have both sought to explain the peculiar “death emotions” that hinge on the realization that one will die. According to Scheffler, all the endings with which I am familiar presuppose my existence; so far it has been I who experience a loss or for whom something ends. But with my death my own existence as the subject of experiences is what ends. Scheffler contends that the way I deal with ordinary losses becomes “unmoored” when directed to myself, and this can induce “panic.” Nagel explains death anxiety as a “collision” between subjective and objective points of view. The subjective point of view, he argues, “does not allow for its own annihilation,” whereas the objective view does.

I have critical remarks to make about Scheffler, Nagel, and several others who have addressed this issue, though I think that Nagel is correct to claim that the subjective point of view cannot allow for its own annihilation. I argue that Nagel’s insight combined with a

Sartrean account of emotion can explain the death emotions not adequately grounded by the standard deprivation account for the badness of death.

For Sartre, emotional experience is a purposeful “degradation of consciousness” whereby we seek to alter the world in difficult situations when our normal consequential ways of dealing with things fails. In short, for Sartre emotional consciousness is a form of magical thinking. Notoriously, Sartre offered two accounts of magical thought, one where we impose magical thinking on the world, and another where the world appears magical to us.

Following Nagel, subjectively my annihilation is impossible; but in a world governed by natural laws the impossible does not happen. That the impossible will happen means that the world is irrational, utterly mysterious--magical. According to Sartre, “the horrible can appear only in the kind of world whose existants are magical by nature...” Thus, I argue, horror and other “death emotions” are our feeble attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible.

### **William Kilborn, “Counterpart Survival”**

There are many ordinary cases according to which an object is annihilated and is then “resurrected”. One such example may be a clock that is temporarily taken apart so that its parts are cleaned and repaired. However, there are also purportedly possible cases according to which an object is annihilated in such a way that makes it seem metaphysically impossible for it to come to exist again. For example, an animal could die and completely rot away. Yet, both lay people and philosophers are of the belief that many objects (including human persons) will—and thus, could—survive such deaths.

Recent attempts to resolve this problem have focused almost entirely on the possibility of living things surviving their deaths. These attempts have been within religious contexts, whereas our approach is more secular. For example, Dean Zimmerman has suggested a model on which human persons undergo ‘gappy fission’ at the time of death; on this model, survival is possible after all. Similarly, Hud Hudson has proposed a four-dimensionalist variant that identifies possible survivors with ‘gappy’ spacetime worms.

As an alternative, we propose a general solution to the problem. This solution is a natural extension of a counterpart-theoretic model of persistence, and according to its proponents, it does not require any further, fanciful story, unlike its rivals. Moreover, in addition to human persons, it explains survival in ordinary cases of disassembly and reassembly; those cases are otherwise somewhat perplexing.

Temporal counterpart theory is a theory of persistence according to which ordinary objects are instantaneous stages, but nevertheless persist through time in virtue of having counterparts that exist at those times. Counterparts are entities that are similar to one another (where the relevant type of similarity is typically thought to be contextual).

Tensed statements are given a counterpart-theoretic analysis, such that, for example, (S) Sal will be tall is true iff Sal has a future counterpart that is tall. Using this analysis, tensed statements purportedly turn out to have the truth values that ordinary language speakers would ordinarily take them to have.

Temporal counterpart theory is taken by some to have significant advantages over its competitors. Not only does it resolve the problem of temporary intrinsics, but it also offers the resources to solve a wide variety of paradoxes in an elegant and fairly unified way.

With this background, according to one popular species of counterpart theory, qualitative similarity is the only relevant consideration for persistence. Suppose at time

t1, Sal is annihilated. Nevertheless, suppose that at t2, there exists an object similar to Sal in every relevant respect. Since in virtue of this similarity, this object is Sal's counterpart, and since (we are assuming) persistence is just a matter of having counterparts at the right times, it is true that Sal exists at t2, even though Sal was annihilated at t1. (Similarly, according to temporal counterpart theory, objects can genuinely persist despite being instantaneous.)

Our final assessment discusses worries for the view (e.g., possibly, two counterparts exist simultaneously) along with potential advantages.

### **Yael Lavi, "Anti-Sisyphus: On Camus' Philosophical Suicide"**

In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Albert Camus opens his famous account of the absurd by addressing the question of suicide: "Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (M 3). According to Camus's analysis, the absurd is a two-term relation between human and the universe. That relation entails an irreducible tension between the human longing for meaning, belonging, and certainty on the one hand and on the other the indifference, contingent reality. Facing the absurd, notes Camus, answering whether one's "life is or is not worth living," means to perform an act of evaluation, reasoning, and judgment which should be made "by virtue of the disproportion between his intentions and the reality he will encounter" (M 29).

Camus identifies only three possible strategies of human reaction to the absurd: (i) Suicide, i.e., ending one own life in order to escape the absurdity of existence;(ii) Philosophical Suicide, i.e., embracing some absolute, transcendent values or objective a priori principles; and (iii) the Revolt, i.e., "to live life without appeal"(M 45)", but rather throughout intensity lucidity and permanent irreconciliation.

Nonetheless, it is only the rebel, which he finds logically permissible given the absurd structure proposition, and therefore as ethically required. Suicide and philosophical suicide, argues Camus, fail to do so since it withdraws one of the absurd's conditional terms. The latter, by committing a "leap of faith" toward objectivity and generality, the former by fully surrendering or refusing to the absurd.

Both these reactions, argue Camus, are "just the contrary by the consent it presupposes. Suicide, like the leap [of faith], is acceptance at its extreme" (M 54), because "The absurd has meaning only insofar as it is not agreed to" (M 31). Thus, he concludes, "It is essential to die unreconciled and not of one's own free will. Suicide is a repudiation [...] The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end [...] The absurd is his extreme tension, which he constantly maintains by solitary effort [...]" (M 55).

However, I will argue, there is a serious question regarding the validity of Camus' arguments that suicide is not a legitimate response to the absurd. The question to be asked is derived from inconsistency (1) due to the absurd's formulation, which dictates far-reaching epistemic conclusions far beyond what Camus is willing to admit, and (2) from unsoundness due to Camus's inadequate and lacking account of the suicidal phenomena. Camus's error, I will further argue, is articulated again throughout Sisyphus's myth the essay's end (M119-123). Thus, (3) the re-write myth is not only inconsistent with Camus's own notion of liberty but also, and maybe more importantly, bears some disturbing political implications. Lastly, (4) having in mind Gilles Deleuze's suicide, and while still holding Camus's concept of absurd, I wish to offer a plausible account of the absurdist suicide as a manifestation of subjectivity.



### **Jelena Markovic, “Loving, Recovering”**

Dan Moller (2007) introduces the resilience problem for grief: many of us grieve for a shorter period of time and with a lower intensity than seems warranted given the severity of the loss. Moller’s argument has typically been interpreted through the notion of fittingness (Schönherr 2021, Na’Aman 2021a,b). Given the severity of the loss, it is fitting or appropriate that we grieve for longer than we do. Related questions then arise about whether grief remains forever fitting, in which case we always cease to grieve for the wrong reasons, or whether the fittingness of grief diminishes, and how to account for this (see also Marušić 2018). In this paper I will highlight a different aspect of Moller’s argument, namely that Moller is arguing for a meta-attitude of regret towards the cessation of our grief. We can call this interpretation the tragedy view of grief. On this interpretation, the cessation of grief is a tragedy of sorts and merits regret. Although ceasing to grieve is either appropriate or what we have most reason to do, something important is lost when we cease to grieve. And this loss warrants an attitude of regret.

Moller argues that resilient grief merits regret because it indicates that we are not as important to each other as we think. Aaron Smuts (2016) makes a related argument about contemplating our future resilience, namely, that we are alienated from our present cares if we look forward a resilient future. These arguments miss the mark. The case of transformative experience illustrates that we can have radical changes in our values without the pre-transformation set being unimportant to us. Further, functional irrepleacability is not an appropriate indicator of importance when it comes to our loving relationships since, both empirically and per Moller’s own argument, it is distinct from care. Ceasing to grieve thus does not indicate that the loved one was not important.

I argue that Moller fails to locate the true source of the tragedy of resilience. The cessation of grief is not a tragedy because it indicates that the loved one was not important. Rather, the cessation of grief serves to highlight a pervasive existential condition, one that underwrites grief itself. And that is that the objects of our love and investment are contingent. Through the course of our lives, we become practically and emotionally invested in contingent beings, and when they cease to exist, we must alter the nature of these investments. What merits regret is not the cessation of grief, rather, the cessation of grief highlights a condition of our lives that is so pervasive that we are adapted to it. The source of the tragedy is in this condition, not our response to it.

### **Alberto Molina Perez, “Conceptual Inconsistency in the Criteria for Death Determination”**

Since 1968, a brain-based criterion of death has been adopted in medical practice and passed into law or national guidelines in most countries worldwide. In some countries, such as Australia, Spain, and the United States, death can be determined by either the circulatory and respiratory criterion or by the neurological criterion. This practice corresponds to recommendations by the World Health Organization and the World Medical Association. In the USA, the Uniform Determination of Death Act (UDDA) provides that “an individual who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem, is dead.”

We show that the UDDA contains two conflicting interpretations of the phrase “cessation of functions”. On the one hand, it can mean the cessation of spontaneous functions, i.e. the cessation of the organ’s spontaneous functioning. By this interpretation, what matters for the determination of death is the cessation of spontaneous functions only, regardless of their generation by artificial means. On the other hand, it can mean the cessation of either spontaneous or artificially supported functions. Because each UDDA

criterion uses a different interpretation, the law is conceptually inconsistent. The inconsistency may derive from the conceptual assumptions underlying the whole-brain conception of death. This conception claims that (1) life requires the spontaneous integration of the organism, and that (2) the integration of the organism requires the spontaneous functioning of the brain (or part of it). Both claims are false in the context of contemporary medicine.

We then explore several ways to address the UDDA's inconsistency. One is to leave the UDDA as it is, acknowledging that death as defined by the law may not necessarily be equivalent to biological death and thus may be considered a legal fiction. Another is to use only one of the UDDA's two criteria, that is, either a single circulatory-respiratory criterion under a broad interpretation of "function" that encompasses both spontaneous and artificially supported functions, or a single brain criterion under a narrow interpretation of "function" limited to spontaneous brain functions. We found no other viable option. If the first criterion were selected, brain death would no longer be considered equivalent to human death. If the second criterion were selected, death would be declared after the irreversible cessation of spontaneous brain functions, in two different medical situations: the irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions that secondarily leads to the irreversible cessation of spontaneous brain function, or the irreversible cessation of spontaneous brain functions, while circulatory and respiratory functions are artificially sustained. This solution would not disrupt current medical practice but it would require a new scientific and philosophical justification that is different from the whole-brain rationale.

### **Piotr Nowak, "Death as a Cessation of an Organism and the Most Favorable Alternative"**

According to the current status quo in official documents, brain death might be equated with the death of a human being because it is the death of an organism. However, empirical evidence collected by Allan Shewmon clearly shows that brain-dead bodies under artificial support are capable of the maintenance of many functions that are essential for living organisms, so they cannot be perceived as biologically dead. Shewmon's findings argue for changes in healthcare policies related to end-of-life care at ICUs. One option is to reexamine the biological concept of death underling the current neurological standard for the determination of death. In this paper, I argue for substituting it with the moral one, which is based on the notion of the irreversible loss of a human's moral status. I defend such a concept against a popular argument according to which the moral concept of death is too nebulous to constitute a firm basis for healthcare policy. I show that the dominant biological view of death is no better in this respect. This is because its central thesis, according to which all living organisms die equally, makes use of the concept of an organism that is no more unified in modern biology than the concept of moral status or the concept of a person in modern ethics. Moreover, the moral concept of death is more appropriate since it directly addresses our main practical concerns associated with the determination of death, namely that the dead themselves, in contrast to the living, cannot be helped, harmed, or wronged in any way.

### **Adam Patterson, "Getting All Emotional About Being Dead"**

You will die someday. So will I. And so will everyone else. Be it from old age, a freak accident, climate change or even the sun swallowing planet, we all will die. Here is a question. Does entraining that fact make you afraid? I think that most would say 'yes'. However, here is another question: is that fear rational? For most—Epicurus (1996) and Lucretius (1948) included—the answer is "it depends". On what? Well, the answer may

depend on whether death is overall bad for—or harmful to—the one whom dies, (e.g., Fischer 1993; Nagel 1970; Murphy 1993; Le Poidevin 1996; Luper 2009; Draper 1999, 2013; Nussbaum 2013; Kaufman 2016). Or whether it hurts the one whom dies (Hume, *On Death*). Or whether “rationality” is centrally concerned with the satisfaction of one’s self-interest (e.g., Spinoza; Murphy). And so on. Yet the rationality of the fear of death may also depend on one’s antecedently accepted theory of emotion and its corresponding account of emotional correctness. Yet few, if any at all, have brought such views and considerations to bear on the subject. I do that here. I argue that on cognitivist theories of emotions and the new, attitudinal theory of emotions, one’s self-regarding fear of being non-existent is not correct in which case the fear is not highly cognitively rational.

### **Wataru Sasaki, “Death, Consolation, and Time”**

This paper will examine whether contemporary metaphysics of time offers any reason to change emotional attitudes toward one’s own death or mortality. I would answer affirmatively, but the way to do it will be slightly different from what other philosophers have tried.

Some philosophers (Le Poidevin (1996), Burley (2008), Robson (2014), Deng (2018), and Story (2021), etc.) have discussed whether A versus B debates on time can offer any reason to be less afraid of death. Advocates argue that B-theory of time (or some related views on persistence) give consolation to one’s own mortality. But, in those discussions, what “consolation” means seems ambiguous and not clear enough, which makes it difficult to evaluate them. Thus, I will try to spell out possible interpretations of what “consolation” could mean there. Yet, I argue that all of them have some drawbacks.

One way to elaborate on “consolation” is that certain truth(s) of fundamental metaphysics can change or rectify our belief and emotional attitude toward death. For example, Parfit (1984) famously stated that the truth of his Non-Reductionist view of personal identity consoled his mortal fear and that it enabled him to be “less concerned about” the rest of his own life.

However, I argue that this elaboration is unsuccessful. The reason is twofold. Firstly, as Sider (2011, 2012) contends, there might be a distinction between the underlying and practical facts, and the latter does not necessarily consist of the former. Second, more specifically, recent advancements in temporal phenomenology suggest that although our experience as of temporal passage is illusions (or, even worse, we might not have such experiences *per se*), we may still rationally believe otherwise. If our emotional attitudes toward death hinge on what we actually believe about time rather than what time is actually like, then metaphysics of time would not straightly console the fear as of that.

Another interpretation is that consolation means that if we use metaphysics as some sort of religion, as Deng (2015) interprets Le Poidevin (1996) ’s idea, it might give us some reasons or justifications to believe that the beliefs which are seemingly plausible and we actually have are all wrong or illusions. In so doing, one might leave out the mortal fear by voluntarily believing in the static view of time and the spatial extension of one’s temporal life though they cannot discard the beliefs (or experiences) on the flow of time. This solution somewhat alleviates the problem described above. But I argue it is still dubious that this position is practically helpful.

For those reasons, I am afraid that focusing on whether metaphysics may “console” our fear of death fails to capture the genuine relationship between metaphysics and mortal fear. In the rest of the paper, I will attempt to build another way to discuss how we can use metaphysics to understand our emotional attitude toward death without using “consolation.” Perhaps, it would be better to focus on more particular topics than straightly applying A versus B debates to this matter. Namely, we can depict our phenomenology of

death more precisely by using discoveries of contemporary metaphysics in more specific contexts.

### **Rhys Southan, “The Harm of Annihilation, and Benatar’s Pessimistic Predicament”**

In *The Human Predicament*, David Benatar writes, “Life is bad, but so is death. ... Together, they constitute an existential vise—the wretched grip that enforces our predicament.” Benatar seems to claim both life and death are bad overall—that it’s bad to live, but death offers no escape from badness because it’s bad to cease existing too. This dual pessimism is incoherent if we accept an exclusively deprivationist account in which death is bad overall only when it deprives us of life that’s good overall, and that when life is bad overall, death is good overall.

This may be why Benatar says deprivationism explains only part of death’s harm. Along with depriving us of goods of life, Benatar says death harmfully obliterates our very lives themselves. He calls this feature of death “annihilation.”

Annihilation’s harm may seem to resolve the contradiction of both life and death being bad overall. I’ll argue it doesn’t. Benatar claims, a bit mysteriously, that the timing of annihilation affects its badness. I’ll argue that only makes sense if annihilation is a comparative (not intrinsic) harm of deprivation which deprives us of what I’ll call “self-goods”—a package of goods distinct from standard goods of life, encompassing various goods of existence itself. The problem for Benatar is if all death’s harms are comparative, death is still only overall bad if life is overall good. “Life is bad, but so is death” remains paradoxical. Instead of demonstrating both death and life are bad overall, recognizing self-goods reveals Benatar was too stingy with his assessment of quality of life. If it’s comparatively bad to lose one’s very self, or consciousness itself, that’s because it’s good to be oneself and have consciousness itself. By contributing continuous goodness to life, self-hood and consciousness may help outweigh the onslaught of bads in life Benatar so vividly laments.

This leaves Benatar in a pessimist’s dilemma. He must either abandon pessimism about life, accepting that life is good overall, or lose pessimism about death and concede death is good overall. I’ll weigh Benatar’s options.

Unhinging either side of the vise has disadvantages for pessimism; a one-sided vise can thwack us but cannot crush us. Yet considering the primary practical stance Benatar advocates in *Better Never to Have Been* and *The Human Predicament*—that humans should go extinct by preventing new lives while mostly allowing already existing lives to continue—giving up pessimism about quality of life may be Benatar’s best bet. Benatar still has his notorious asymmetry to argue it’s wrong to create new lives—including overall good ones—if they contain even a tiny amount of badness. Thus, Benatar can advocate extinction by childlessness even while accepting life is overall good. If Benatar instead abandons pessimism about death, because life is still overall bad despite the self-goods, he must change his stance and advocate “pro-mortalism”: that we all generally benefit from dying as soon as possible. This would be tantamount to endorsing mass suicide, which Benatar is reluctant to do.

### **Andrea Asker Svedberg, “Posthumous Harm and Unconditional Desires – A Challenge for Desire Satisfactionist Accounts”**

David Boonin (2019) presents a desire-satisfactionist account of posthumous harm where the subject of harm is the antemortem person. This account subscribes to the Desire Satisfaction Principle, DSP: If A’s act makes a proposition P false, and B wants P to be true, then A’s act harms B. Using DSP, Boonin illustrates the possibility of posthumous harm with the following example: Alice wants it to be true that P: “After my death, my

ashes are scattered near the top of my favorite mountain." After Alice's death, Ted flushes Alice's ashes down the toilet. Ted's act makes P false, which frustrates Alice's desire and harms her while she is alive and holding the desire (Boonin, 2019, Chapter 3).

One prominent objection against this view is the Changing Desires Objection (CDO). The gist of CDO is that, on the above view, a desire is satisfied even if the desirer abandons the desire before its object obtains. For instance, if I now desire that I will go to Japan next year, and it is true that I will go to Japan next year, then my desire is satisfied now even if I abandon it before the trip takes place. Boonin concedes that this is an implausible result and aims to avoid it by arguing that "there is only one way to harm a person by frustrating their past desires in cases where those desires have since changed: frustrating the future oriented desires they had that were not conditional on their future persistence" (Boonin, 2019, p. 85), and since desires concerning posthumous events are by nature not conditional on their own persistence (because the desirer will cease to exist before the object of the desire obtains), this result is consistent with the possibility of posthumous harm.

However, this reasoning yields other problematic results. To see this, consider a version of the Alice example: At age 25, Alice desires that her ashes be scattered at the beach (D1). At age 50, Alice abandons D1 and desires instead that her ashes be scattered in the fields (D2). Alice dies at age 75. After Alice's death, Ted scatters Alice's ashes at the beach. On Boonin's account, D1 is satisfied and D2 is frustrated. Hence, Alice both gets what she wants and does not get what she wants in terms of where her ashes are scattered. I will argue that this result is implausible. The result could of course be avoided by conditioning D1 on Alice not changing her mind about the ash-scattering location before she dies. But this would require adopting something like DSP\*: "If A's act makes a proposition P false, at t B wants P to be true, and B will never voluntarily abandon the desire that P be true, then A's act harms B" (Boonin, 2019, p. 78), which Boonin rejects as arbitrary. Hence, there is a dilemma threatening to undermine Boonin's defense against CDO. This paper will unpack this problem and explore its general implications for desire-satisfactionist accounts of posthumous harm.

### **Joshua Tepley, "Philosophy of Death in Classic Science Fiction"**

An ongoing debate in analytic philosophy of death is whether we should want to live forever. The locus classicus on this question is Bernard Williams' "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" (1973), which takes its inspiration—and main illustration—from the main character in Karel Capek's *The Makropulos Case* (1922). Capek's play is a work of science fiction, and Capek is an early contributor to this now ubiquitous genre. In fact, outside of philosophy, Capek is best known for his play *R.U.R.*, or *Rossum's Universal Robots* (1922), in which the term "robot" is used for the very first time.

While Capek is remembered for his early contributions to science fiction, he is not considered to be one of the greatest writers in this genre. This honor goes to, among others, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert A. Heinlein (the "Big Three" in science fiction). But while such authors, no less than Capek, delve into the philosophy of death, their writings on this topic have received no attention by contemporary philosophers.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce contemporary philosophers to four classic science fiction short stories about death. The questions these stories raise are no less philosophically interesting or existentially important than the one raised by Capek's play. It is my hope that these four works will inspire fresh debates in the philosophy of death just as Capek's play inspired a fresh debate through Williams' classic paper.

The four stories I will discuss in this paper are the following:

(1) Robert A. Heinlein’s “Life-Line” (1939), in which a man invents a machine that accurately predicts the date of a person’s death. The main philosophical question raised by this story is whether we should want to know when we will die.

(2) Ray Bradbury’s “Kaleidoscope” (1949), in which a group of astronauts are ejected from a damaged spaceship and hurtle out into space to their deaths. While this story raises a number of interesting questions, the one I will focus on is whether death is the “great equalizer,” in the sense that our shared mortality eclipses all of our other differences (e.g., life achievements).

(3) Arthur C. Clarke’s “Death and the Senator” (1961), in which an American senator is diagnosed with a heart condition that can be cured only on a Russian space hospital. This story, like the others, raises a number of interesting philosophical questions, but the one I will focus on is what price we should be willing to pay—both literally and metaphorically—to extend a person’s life.

(4) Isaac Asimov’s “The Bicentennial Man” (1976), in which a humanoid robot tries to become a “man” (human being) by transforming his mechanical body into a biological one and eventually voluntarily undergoing an operation to make him mortal. One of the philosophical questions raised by this story is whether humans are essentially mortal.

### **Travis Timmerman, “Annihilation Isn’t Bad For You”**

One objection raised against anti-natalism is that if it is better never to have been, then anti-natalists must think it would be prudent to immediately kill themselves rather than endure living any additional life. I’ll refer to this objection as the suicide objection to anti-natalism.

In *The Human Predicament* (2017), David Benatar responds to this objection, in part, by rightly noting that this conclusion simply does not follow. For while coming into existence may be bad for all persons, premature death may generally be even worse for them than continued life. If this is right, then anti-natalism needn’t entail that it would be prudent for people to commit suicide. Getting to the heart of this issue about anti-natalism requires answering a fundamental question about death. Can death be bad for the person who dies and, if so, what makes death bad? The success of Benatar’s reply to the suicide objection hinges on whether premature death really is worse for most people than continued life.

To help his anti-natalism avoid the suicide objection, Benatar develops and defends the novel and ingenious annihilation view, according to which “death is bad in large part because it annihilates the being who dies.” Benatar’s annihilation view serves as a competitor to deprivationism, viz. the view that death is bad for a person to the extent that (and because) it prevents them from living additional (net) good life. Benatar argues at length that his annihilation view is superior to deprivationism since it avoids many of the problems to which deprivationism is supposedly subject. Moreover, the annihilation of moral persons is supposed to be bad enough that it’s prudent for most people to delay their annihilation and continue living instead of committing suicide. So, Benatar takes the annihilation view to be both superior to deprivationism and allow the anti-natalist to successfully avoid the suicide objection.

In this paper, I make both a positive and negative argument against the annihilation view. My positive argument consists in showing that the annihilation view generates implausible consequences in cases where one can incur some other (intrinsic) bad to avoid the supposed (intrinsic) bad of annihilation. Avoiding the implausible consequences I identify requires denying that annihilation is itself bad. My negative argument consists in attempting to undercut some motivation for the annihilation view by showing how

standard forms of deprivationism can avoid the particular problems Benatar ascribes to them. This paper is structured as follows. In the first section, I review deprivationism, as well as some motivations for (and objections against) standard versions of the view. In the second section, I review Benatar's annihilation view, as well as his motivations for accepting the annihilation view in more detail. In the third section, I make my positive argument against the annihilation view. Finally, I make my negative argument against the annihilation view in the fourth section. If my arguments are successful, they should collectively provide defeasible reason to accept standard forms of deprivationism over the annihilation view.

### **Joe Ulatowski and David Beisecker, "The Exhaustion of Science and the Pointlessness of Immortality"**

Some pessimistic philosophers have argued that we have no prudential reason to live an immortal life and that an immortal life would necessarily be bad for us. Bernard Williams (1973) reached this conclusion in his assessment of the case of Elina Makropulos. Williams claims, "it can be a good thing not to live long." Williams' view has generated the so-called Makropulos debate, which concerns whether living an immortal life is meaningful. Those who agree with Williams' assessment that an immortal life would be a bore are labeled 'immortality curmudgeons' and those who disagree are called 'immortality optimists'. One immortality optimist, Donald Bruckner (2012), has challenged Williams' account by arguing that human ingenuity shows no signs of stopping or slowing down. Human ingenuity would continually open up new paths of inquiry and expression, and thus relieve immortals from insufferable tedium. The argument from human ingenuity challenges the view of immortality that there are only finitely many classes of relevantly similar things to do, lives to lead, and experiences to have. According to the human ingenuity argument, the options available to agents over time is constantly evolving and changing sometimes resulting in entirely new similarity classes. The reason for change in an individual's options is "that human ingenuity changes them and creates new ones" (Bruckner 2012, 632f [his emphasis])

In this paper, we aim to challenge Bruckner's argument from human ingenuity. In effect, we argue that body-bound immortality would be bad for us because we might reach a point at which efforts to engage in future inquiry is pointless. If our suspicions prove correct, then Bruckner's argument from human ingenuity might be overly optimistic. After summarizing Williams' argument against the desirability of a body-bound immortal life and presenting Bruckner's three replies, we present some considerations in support of the possibility that fruitful inquiry might actually come to an end. It is apparent that scientific inquiry is becoming increasingly intensive in terms of resources and human capital. The days of great discovery by isolated researchers working alone in their labs with minimal support are vanishing, as such discoveries seem increasingly fewer and far-between. The vision of The Nutty Professor discovering Flubber is now as quaint as that of the lone prospector searching the hills for the mother lode. Instead, advances in science and technology are now the products of increasingly larger teams collaborating with the backing of ever-larger research budgets. Whereas it seems that Bruckner has supported a view of human ingenuity that will continue to make discoveries at a similar or ever-increasing rate, we think instead that it is entirely conceivable that new scientific discoveries will either level off or begin to diminish. The rate of new and interesting discoveries leading to other discoveries will begin to ebb and decline more rapidly as time passes. Thus human ingenuity might not continue indefinitely, and so a body-bound immortal life might become pointless.

## **Tomasz Zuradzki, “Deep Uncertainties in the Criteria for Physician Aid in Dying for Psychiatric Patients”**

There is an inconsistency between an involuntary psychiatric commitment for suicide prevention and physician aid in dying (PAD). Some authors believe that it may be possible to resolve the problem by articulating “objective standards for evaluating the severity of others’ suffering” (Kious & Battin 2019). In my presentation, I will discuss some theoretical difficulties in creating such standards stemming from three types of uncertainties: (1) diagnostic, (2) motivational, and (3) existential.

The first type concerns the unique nature of the diagnosis of mental illnesses, which are recognized almost entirely on the basis of an interview with a patient and observation of a patient’s behavior, and therefore do not capture any information about the underlying pathophysiology. If the etiology of mental illness is unknown, it may be difficult for a psychiatrist to formulate any decisive judgment on the development of the disease or the expected quality of life of a psychiatric patient that is necessary to determine whether a further life of a given patient would be most likely “worse than death.”

The second type of uncertainty (“motivational”) is related to the patient’s decision-making capacities. It is conceptually possible to distinguish a reaction to the illness from a reaction from illness, even in cases of diseases for which suicidal ideation are characteristic. However, the problem is that the assessment of mental capacity (including the sources of a wish for death) does not consist only in checking structural relations between one’s attitudinal mental states independently of whether those states are justified. Opinions on a patient’s mental capacity are always highly value loaded and hinge on our normative standards about what constitutes reasonable or appropriate reactions and attitudes.

Finally, the “existential” type of uncertainty is characteristic for all life-and-death decisions and stems from a need to weigh expected harms of existence that are full of suffering with the alleged “benefits” of dying earlier. At first glance, these values are incommensurable, like apples and oranges, which makes the project of their weighing conceptually unsound. Furthermore, this kind of weighing depends on solving the age-old philosophical question about the wrongness of death.

Finally, I will argue that any standard for PAD should help balance the risks of the two types of errors that using the terminology from statistics we can name: a type I error (false positive) and a type II error (false negative). The main discussion between advocates and opponents of the legalization of PAD depends on attitudes toward weighing these two types of risks: The opponents believe that avoiding false positives (i.e., situations where a patient has “a nonauthentic” wish for death but it is accepted) is much more important than avoiding false negatives (i.e., situations where a patient has “an authentic” wish for death but it is rejected).