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Death, Badness, and the Impossibility of Experience
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Source: *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1997), pp. 341-353
Published by: Springer
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115559
Accessed: 24/02/2011 13:15

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DEATH, BADNESS, AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF EXPERIENCE

(Received 16 June 1995; accepted 22 July 1996)

ABSTRACT. Some have argued (following Epicurus) that death cannot be a bad thing for an individual who dies. They contend that nothing can be a bad for an individual unless the individual is able to experience it as bad. I argue against this "Epicurean" view, offering examples of things that an individual cannot experience as bad but are nevertheless bad for the individual. Further, I argue that death is relevantly similar.

KEY WORDS: death, badness, harm, deprivation, experience, Epicurus

> Dying
> Is an art, like everything else.
> I do it exceptionally well.
>
> I do it so it feels like hell.
> I do it so it feels real.
> I guess you could say I've a call, . . . (Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus")

> Few Fallacies depressed me more than the line, 'I don't mind being dead; it's just like being asleep. It's the dying I can't face.' Nothing seemed clearer to me in my nocturnal terrors than that death bore no resemblance to sleep. I wouldn't mind dying at all, I thought, as long as I didn't end up Dead at the end of it. (Julian Barnes, *Metroland*)[1]

I. NAGEL AND THE CRITIQUE OF EPICURUS

It is a perennial philosophical puzzle how death can be bad for the individual who dies. Insofar as death is construed as an experiential blank, some have argued (following Epicurus) that one's own death (as opposed

[1] I am indebted to G. Dworkin for bringing this passage to my attention. In "Death," T. Nagel expresses a similar view: "It is sometimes suggested that what we really mind is the process of dying. But I should not really object to dying if it were not followed by death" [T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 1–10; reprinted in J.M. Fischer (ed.), *The Metaphysics of Death* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 61–69].

The Journal of Ethics **1:** 341–353, 1997.
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to one's dying) cannot be bad for one; after all, one does not experience death as bad or have any unpleasant experiences as a result of it. As the saying goes, "What you don't know can't hurt you."

But is the view expressed by this saying correct? Thomas Nagel has argued that it is not.[2] Nagel argues that an individual can be harmed by something which does not result in any unpleasant experiences for that individual.[3] He employs the following example in support of his position:

> It [the view that what you don't know can't hurt you] means that even if a man is betrayed by his friends, ridiculed behind his back, and despised by people who treat him politely to his face, none of it can be counted as a misfortune for him so long as he does not suffer as a result.[4]

Let us call Nagel's example the "betrayal-behind-one's-back" example (or the "betrayal" example). Other philosophers have presented similar examples in support of the view that what one does not know can indeed hurt (or at least harm or be bad for) one.[5]

But various philosophers have replied to Nagel. In order to develop the approach of Nagel's critics, it is helpful to distinguish two principles:

> Experience Requirement I (ER I): An individual can be harmed by something only if he has an unpleasant experience as a result of it (either directly or indirectly).
> Experience Requirement II (ER II): An individual can be harmed by something only if it is possible for him to have an unpleasant experience as a result of it (either directly or indirectly).

The critics have noted that Nagel's betrayal-behind-one's back-example only impugns (ER I), and not (ER II). After all, it is presumably *possible* (in some appropriate sense) for the individual in Nagel's example to find out about the betrayal and thus have unpleasant experiences, even if he actually does not. Further, these philosophers have emphasized that (ER II) appears

[2] T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (1979), pp. 1–10.

[3] If the individual has unpleasant experiences simply as a result of discovering or recognizing that a certain event has taken place, this is a relatively "direct" way in which that event results in unpleasant experiences. If, however, the event has consequences (other than mere recognition by the individual) that then cause unpleasant experiences in the individual, this would be a relatively "indirect" way in which the event results in unpleasant experiences. For a similar distinction, see J. McMahan, "Death and the Value of Life," *Ethics* 99 (1988), pp. 32–61, esp. pp. 32–34; this essay is reprinted in Fischer (ed.), pp. 233–266. I mean to include both direct and indirect ways of resulting in unpleasant experiences in my discussion in this paper.

[4] Nagel, p. 4.

[5] See J. Feinberg, *Harm to Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 86–87; and R. Nozick, "On the Randian Argument," in J. Paul (ed.), *Reading Nozick* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), p. 221.

to imply that death – construed as an experiential blank – is not bad for the individual who dies: death rules out even the possibility of experience. Thus, it is alleged that Nagel's example falls short of establishing that death can be bad for an individual. What is needed (according to these philosophers), and what has not been provided, is a counterexample to (ER II) rather than simply to (ER I); that is, what is required is a non-question-begging example in which an individual *cannot* have unpleasant experiences as a result of something and yet we would say that that thing is bad for the individual.[6]

It will be useful to have some examples of this criticism of Nagel before us. Harry Silverstein says:

> ... Nagel's argument has force only against the strongest and least plausible version of VCF [the "Values Connect with Feelings" view], the version that requires that the value-recipient *actually have* the appropriate feeling. It has no force against more plausible versions, e.g., a version according to which x can intelligibly be said to have a certain A-relative value provided merely that it be possible, or possible under certain conditions, for A to have the appropriate feeling as a result of x. For A's suffering from, e.g., undetected betrayal is possible in the sense that he may later discover the betrayal and suffer as a result – indeed, he may then suffer, not merely from the fact that he was betrayed but from the fact that the betrayal was undetected until that time. Thus, Nagel's examples are quite consistent with, and therefore constitute no argument against, this weaker version of VCF ...
>
> Hence, Nagel's argument by counterexample is insufficient ...[7]

Following Silverstein on this point, Stephen Rosenbaum says:

> Thomas Nagel argues that what a person does not know may well be bad for the person. Nagel seems thereby to object to premise (A) [A state of affairs is bad for person P only if P can experience it at some time]. He gives plausible cases in which something can be bad for a person even if the person is unaware of it. Unknown betrayal by friends and destruction of one's reputation by vile, false rumors of which one is unaware are examples of evils which a person might not consciously experience. Strictly, however, such cases are logically compatible with (A) [ER II] and hence do not refute (A) [ER II], since all (A) [ER II] requires for something to be bad for a person is that the person *can* experience it (perhaps not consciously) at some time, not that he actually experience it consciously. We can grant that what one *does not* consciously experience can hurt one without granting that what one *cannot* experience can hurt one.[8]

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[6] For the purposes of this discussion, I will not distinguish between something's being bad for an individual and that thing's harming the individual.

[7] H.S. Silverstein, "The Evil of Death," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), pp. 414–415; reprinted in Fischer (ed.), pp. 95–110.

[8] S.E. Rosenbaum, "How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986), p. 221; the essay in reprinted in Fischer (ed.), 119–134. Another proponent of (ER II) is W. Glannon, who appears to base much of his view of death's badness on something like it. In his article, "Temporal Asymmetry, Life, and Death," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994), pp. 235–244, Glannon is not always careful

II. A DEFENSE OF NAGEL: NAGEL MEETS FRANKFURT

I concede that Nagel's betrayal-behind-one's-back-example does not, as it stands, decisively establish the falsity of (ER II). But I believe it can be modified so that it can indeed establish the falsity of (ER II). The problem with the example is that, although you do not actually have bad experiences as a result of the betrayal, you nevertheless *can* (in some suitable sense) have such experiences (it is thus open to the proponent of [ER II] to admit that you are harmed, but say that this is in virtue of your *ability* to have unpleasant experiences). Now it seems to me that there are various ways in which Nagel's example could be modified so that you *cannot* (in some natural sense) have any bad experiences as a result of the betrayal. One such way employs the idea of a "counterfactual intervener" – an agent who does not play any role in the actual course of events but stands ready to intervene under certain (counterfactual) circumstances.[9]

to distinguish (ER I) from (ER II). For example, the following suggests that Glannon is a proponent of (ER I):

> ... it is irrational to care now about the goods of which we allegedly will be deprived by death. For it is rational to be concerned about the pleasure and pain, the happiness and suffering, that we *actually* experience as persons. Yet we cannot experience anything after we die (p. 238) [emphasis added].

But I believe that Glannon's considered view is (ER II). He says:

> We care about future experienced goods to the extent that we can anticipate actually experiencing them in the lived future. By contrast, in the postmortem future there are no goods that we *can* actually experience, and so there is no reason to be concerned now about the non-actual goods of which death purportedly deprives us (p. 238) [emphasis added].

Also, Glannon says:

> On the intuitively plausible assumption that the value of our lives is a function of what we *can* experience, something is intrinsically good or bad for us only if it is possible for us actually to experience it as such (p. 238). ... Even if death is bad in the extrinsic sense of depriving the deceased of the goods they would have experienced if they had continued to live, it does not follow that it is rational to be concerned about death. For what makes our concern about a state of affairs rational is the *possibility* of our experiencing it as intrinsically good or bad, and we cannot experience anything in the state of postmortem nonexistence (p. 241) [emphasis added].

[9] The "Principle of Alternative Possibilities" states that an agent can be morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise. In "Frankfurt-style" counterexamples to this principle, an agent acts "on his own" in just the way we believe an agent typically acts when we hold him morally responsible; and yet some counterfactual intervener is associated with the agent in such a manner as to render it plausible that the agent cannot do other than what he actually does. The version of Nagel's example I develop

Imagine first that the example is as described by Nagel. You are betrayed behind your back by people who you thought were good friends, and you never actually find out about this or have any bad experiences as a result of the betrayal. But now suppose that these friends were (very) worried that you might find out about the betrayal. In order to guard against this possibility, they arrange for White to watch over you. His task is to prevent you ever from finding out about the betrayal. So, for example, if one of the individuals who betrayed you should decide to tell you about it, White can prevent him from succeeding: White can do whatever is required to prevent the information from getting to you. Or if you should begin to seek out one of the friends, White could prevent you from succeding in making contact. I simply stipulate that White is in a position to thwart any attempt by you or your friends to inform you of what happened.[10]

In this Frankfurt-style version of Nagel's betrayal example, I further stipulate that everything (plausibly thought to be relevant) that actually happens among your friends and to you (and your family) is exactly the same as in the original version of the example; we could "subtract" the existence of White and this would make *no relevant difference* to what actually happens among your friends and to you (and your family) for the rest of your life. The *only* difference between the original case and the modified case is that your friends have so arranged things that White is poised to intervene at any point in your life where there would be a chance that you would discover what happenend; it turns out that intervention is never actually necessary, and thus the actual sequence of events in the modified example is in relevant respects precisely like that of the original example. White serves as a fail-safe mechanism; his intervention is never triggered, but his presence ensures that you will never find out about the betrayal.

I claim that this modified version of Nagel's example is one in which it is plausible to say that something happens that is bad for you – the betrayal – and yet it is *not possible* for you to have any bad experiences as a result of it. If this is correct, then we do indeed have a counterexample to (ER II).

I suppose that someone could concede that in the modified example you cannot have any bad experience as a result of the betrayal but insist

in the text takes its cue from Frankfurt-type counterexamples to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities: H.G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), pp. 828–839; and "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971), pp. 5–20.

[10] The presence of White, so described, appears to rule out the possibility of the betrayal's directly resulting in unpleasant experiences. Although this makes the example a bit less elegant, I also stipulate that White is in a position to prevent indirect unpleasant experiences.

that *precisely this* makes it the case that the betrayal is *not* bad for you. Whereas this position is certainly open to one, it results in the extremely implausible differentiation of the original betrayal case and the modified betrayal case: one must say that you are harmed by the betrayal in the original case but *not* in the modified case. But although you are harmed (according to this view) only in the original case, everything that happens among your friends and to you (and your family) is in all relevant respects the same in both cases.[11] It then seems very implausible to say that you are harmed in the original case but not in the modified case.

I thus claim that the modified example is precisely the sort of example demanded by philosophers such as Silverstein and Rosenbaum in order to establish that (ER II) is to be rejected: an example in which something is bad for an individual and yet it is not even possible for him to have unpleasant experiences as a result of it. The existence of such an example should not be surprising, given certain insights of Nagel. Consider again the original betrayal-behind-one's-back-example. Reflecting on this example, it is natural to think that it is not merely the *actual* lack of unpleasant experiences that is relevant; the example suggests that even the *possibility* of unpleasant experiences is not what makes the betrayal bad. And Nagel provides some theoretical resources that could be developed to bring out this point more explicitly.

After laying out the original version of the example, Nagel says:

> Someone who holds that all goods and evils must be temporally assignable states of the person may of course try to bring difficult cases into line by pointing to the pleasure or pain that more complicated goods and evils cause. Loss, betrayal, deception, and ridicule are on this view bad because people suffer when they learn of them. But it should be asked how our ideas of human value would have to be constituted to accommodate these cases directly instead. One advantage of such an account might be that it would enable us to explain *why* the discovery of these misfortunes causes suffering – in a way that makes it reasonable. For the natural view is that the discovery of betrayal makes us unhappy because it is bad to be betrayed – not that betrayal is bad because its discovery makes us unhappy.[12]

Nagel is here discussing whether future *actual* discovery of the betrayal, with its attendant unpleasant experiences, is what would make the betrayal bad. But his Euthyphro-type point could be adapted to the issue of whether the *possibility* of discovery and attendant unpleasant experiences is what makes the betrayal bad. For it is natural to say that it is not the possiblity of bad experiences that makes betrayal bad, but rather the badness of betrayal that explains why one would have unpleasant experiences given the possible circumstance of discovery of the betrayal. If this sort of analysis of the

[11] Of course, in the modified case your friends arrange for White's presence, but I assume that this in itself (and absent any interventions by White) cannot be a relevant difference.

[12] Nagel, p. 5.

order of explanation is correct, then it is not surprising that there should be examples in which something is bad for an individual and yet there is not even the possibility that the individual have bad experiences as a result.

III. CLARIFICATION: TWO KINDS OF POSSIBILITY

Notoriously, the notion of "possibility" is vague. And of course this notion plays a crucial role in (ER II) and my counterexample to it. It will be useful to make a distinction between a broader and a narrower notion of possibility. The broad notion is "metaphysical possibility in the broad sense." This is the sort of possibility that is (very roughly) compatibility with the laws of logic, the analytic or conceptual truths, and the propositions entailed by basic metaphysical truths (including truths about the essences of things). According to this broad notion of possibility, it *would* be possible for you to have bad experiences as a result of the betrayal even in the modified betrayal example. This is because it is compatible with the laws of logic (and the basic metaphysical truths) that White not succeed in performing his task (for whatever reason).

But broad possibility is very broad indeed. Suppose that you are chained to your chair by very heavy chains which you cannot break, and also imagine that there is no way that you can get anyone else to help you remove the chains (within, say, an hour). Given certain plausible ancillary assumptions, it follows that you cannot get out of the chair within an hour, in the sense of "can" typically thought to be relevant (in some way or another) to moral responsibility. Note, however, that your breaking the chains is compatible with the laws of logic (and the relevant metaphysical truths), and thus your getting out of the chair is possible in the broad sense.

Let us say that the sort of possibility that corresponds to the freedom typically associated (in some way or another) with moral responsibility is "narrow possibility." This sort of possibility implies that the relevant agent have a general ability to do the thing in question and also the opportunity to exercise the ability. Of course, it would be too daunting a task for me to attempt to provide an analysis of the relevant sort of freedom. Here I simply associate the narrower sort of possibility with this freedom (however it is analyzed, if it is analyzed at all). Possibility in the narrow sense implies that a certain course of action is genuinely accessible to or open to an agent. It is not genuinely open to you in the modified betrayal example to discover that you have been betrayed.[13]

[13] I do not here suppose that there is some interesting connection between the issues related to moral responsibility and those related to death; rather, I am simply attempting to

Note that, if the broad notion of possibility is employed in (ER II), then the modified betrayal example is no counterexample. But I would contend that it is the narrow notion of possibility that is relevant to (ER II). Surely, if one is concerned to connect badness (or harm) with the possibility of experience, it is not plausible to employ the broad notion of possibility. Consider, as an example, an individual who has been reduced to a persistent vegetative state as a result of a stroke. Physicians reliably diagnose this person as terminally comatose. Presumably, in the sense of possibility relevant to the issue of whether this individual can be harmed by (say) a betrayal, it is *impossible* for the individual to have unpleasant experiences. But if this is correct, then the relevant notion of possibility cannot be the broad notion, for it is possible in the broad sense for the individual to have unpleasant experiences (as a result, say, of a miraculous recovery of the capacity for consciousness). I contend then that it is the narrow notion of possibility that is appropriately employed in (ER II), and that the modified betrayal example constitutes a counterexample to (ER II) thus interpreted.[14]

IV. IMPLICATION: DEATH'S BADNESS

One implication of this result is to vindicate the Nagelian critique of Epicurus' argument that death is not bad for the individual who dies. In the paper cited above (and others), Rosenbaum has sought to give a reconstruction of Epicurus' argument which withstands Nagel's assault.[15] His main point is that Epicurus relies upon (ER II) rather than (ER I), and thus Nagel's original case does not undermine Epicurus' argument. But if I am correct and the modified betrayal example shows the inadequacy

identify the notion of possibility that is relevant to (ER II). Alternatively, one could simply say that it corresponds to Austin's "all-in" notion of possibility (or "can"): J.L. Austin, "Ifs and Cans," in his *Philosophical Papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). That is, "narrow possibility" – having a pathway genuinely accessible to one – is picked out by Austin's "all-in" sense of "can."

[14] I do not deny that someone could dig in his heels and simply insist that I have not "proved" that narrow possibility is the relevant notion of possibility. I concede this, but I think it is clear that if one bases value on the possibility of experience, it is not plausible to adopt the broader notion of possibility. The intuitive motivation for connecting value with the possibility of experience does not sit well with employing the broad notion of possibility.

[15] Rosenbaum, "How To Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus," and "Epicurus and Annihilation," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 39 (1989), pp. 81–90. The latter essay is reprinted in Fischer (ed.), pp. 293–304.

of (ER II), it follows that Rosenbaum's attempt to provide a defense of Epicurus must fail.

It is interesting to note how Rosenbaum attempts to argue for (ER II):

> Suppose that a person *P* cannot hear and never will hear. Then the egregious performance of a Mozart symphony cannot causally affect *P* at any time, supposing that what makes the performance bad is merely awful sound, detectable only through normal hearing, and supposing further that the performance does not initiate uncommon causal sequences that can affect the person. It is clear that the person cannot experience the bad performance, auditorily or otherwise. Furthermore, it seems clear that the performance cannot be bad for the person in any way. It cannot affect the person in any way. The reason why it is not bad for him is that he is not able to experience it. . . . Similarly, a person born without a sense of smell cannot be causally affected by, and thus cannot experience, the stench of a smoldering cheroot. The stench cannot be an olfactory negativity for her. We could imagine indefinitely many more such cases.
>
> Since I see nothing eccentric about these cases, I believe that we are entitled to generalize and claim that our judgments about these cases are explained by the principle that if a person cannot experience a state of affairs at some time, then the state of affairs is not bad for the person.[16]

Certainly, there is nothing so "eccentric" as a counterfactual intervener (such as White) in the cases envisaged by Rosenbaum. Nevertheless, I contend that his examples are indeed eccentric in the sense of being an inappropriate sample on the basis of which to generalize.

To explain. The question at issue in this dialectic is whether there are some things that are bad for someone and yet cannot result in unpleasant experiences for the individual. Now Rosenbaum invokes a number of examples in which the thing in question typically causes unpleasant experiences: an "egregious performance of a Mozart symphony," and "the stench of a smoldering cheroot." Such things, by their very nature, would be bad for an individual precisely by causally affecting him and producing unpleasant experiences. This is because in these cases the badness could only be (or be the result of) *sensory* unpleasantness. It is surely uncontroversial that in this class of cases an individual cannot be harmed by the thing in question, if he cannot be causally affected by it.

But the critic of Epicurus will point out that this class is *only a proper subclass* of all the relevant cases. There are other cases in which it is alleged that there is something which is bad for an individual even though it does not (and cannot) causally affect the individual. In these cases the alleged badness would not be a *sensory* badness (i.e., an unpleasant experience coming from some offensive sensory stimulus). Now of course it is contentious whether this allegation is true; but all I wish to point out is that it surely is dialectically unfair to point to the "sensory subclass" of

[16] Rosenbaum, "How To Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus," p. 219.

cases and then generalize on the basis of this subclass to the conclusion that badness requires the possibility of experience. And of course the betrayal examples (both the original version and the modified version) are precisely examples which are *not* in the sensory subclass. Here the badness is supposed to be something like the undetected ruining of one's reputation; if the example works as it is supposed to, the mechanism of harm would not be sensory. It is an example of a very different sort.

Let me highlight the – admittedly quite delicate – dialectical situation. The class of putative bad things can be partitioned into various proper sub-classes (in various different ways). On one way of making the partition, one proper sub-class contains putative bad things which involve – by their very nature – unpleasant sensory stimuli; in virtue of this fact, it seems to be true of such putative bads that they could not be bad for an individual who is unable to experience the sensory stimuli. A quite different proper sub-class of putative bads does not contain members which involve unpleasant sensory stimuli; if these are indeed bad for individuals, they could be bad for individuals who are incapable of experiencing them as bad. Given the existence of this second sub-class, it is clearly inappropriate to generalize from the first sub-class to a conclusion such as (ER II). Of course, this does *not* imply that the mere existence of the second sub-class (of *putative* bads) decisively establishes that there are indeed things that are bad for individuals who cannot experience them as bad (or have unpleasant experiences as a result of them): rather, it simply shows that one cannot precipitously generalize from the existence of the first sub-class to (ER II).

Finally, a defender of Epicurus might wish to take a slightly different tack. Rather than focusing on the experience requirement, he may put forward some sort of existence requirement. According to this sort of requirement, an individual cannot be harmed by the occurrence of something at a time T if the individual does not exist at T. Clearly, my argument above does not in itself refute the existence requirement. But it is unclear why one would wish to insist on an existence requirement *apart from an experience requirement*. This is because the most natural reason (or at least a very salient reason) to require existence is that existence is necessary for experience. That is, if one gives up the experience requirement for badness (or harm), why exactly would one cling to the existence requirement? Perhaps there is reason to maintain an existence requirement without an experience requirement, and if so, my argument does not address this position. But my argument clearly has force against the proponent of an existence requirement who *bases it upon an experience requirement*. And

it seems to shift the argumentative burden to a proponent of the existence requirement to explain its basis, if it is not the experience requirement.[17]

V. CONCLUSION

Nagel's "betrayal" example is a case in which it seems that the betrayal is *directly* bad for someone – bad for someone quite apart from the individual's experiencing anything unpleasant as a result of the betrayal. It seems intuitively that actual or even possible experience is *not* what makes the betrayal bad. Further, Nagel's "Euthyphro-type" point (about the order of explanation of the badness of betrayal) provides some theoretical backing for the intuitive notion that experiential considerations are not the basis of the view that the betrayal is bad. Nagel's example and theoretical insight then show that in principle there should be examples in which something is bad for an agent even though he *cannot* have bad experiences as a result. The "Frankfurt-type" version of Nagel's original betrayal case is precisely this sort of example. And if so, then (ER II), together with the most powerful reconstruction of the Epicurean argument against death's badness, must be rejected.

Note, also, that if (ER II) is rejected, then so also must an intriguing recent argument by Walter Glannon.[18] Lucretius argued that posthumous and prenatal nonexistence should be treated *symmetrically*, and that, since we do not think of prenatal nonexistence as a bad thing, we should also not think of death as a bad thing. Various philosophers have responded, insisting on the commonsense *asymmetry*: prenatal nonexistence is not a bad thing, but death is.[19] Glannon has employed (ER II) to argue for precisely the *opposite* asymmetry: since we can (while we are alive) have unpleasant experiences as a result of things that happen in the prenatal environment, but we cannot have bad experiences after we are dead, Glannon argues that prenatal nonexistence can be bad for an individual, but death is not. However, it is clear that if (ER II) is rejected, then there is no basis for Glannon's asymmetry.

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[17] Suppose one sought to defend the existence requirement by basing it on some sort of requirement of the possibilty of "being affected." On this approach, something could not be bad for one, if it were impossible for one to be affected by it (quite apart from experiencing it). It seems to me that the Frankfurt-style counterexample employed above against (ER II) would also work against this sort of approach.

[18] Glannon.

[19] See, for example, A.L. Brueckner and J.M. Fischer, "Why Is Death Bad?" *Philosophical Studies* 50 (1986), pp. 213–223; reprinted in Fischer (ed.), pp. 221–229. See also, F. Kamm, *Morality, Mortality*, Vol. One (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

I wish to end with an even more fanciful example and some speculative reflections on its implications. Imagine that your spouse and your best friend are on a space colony orbiting Mars, which is now on the opposite side of the sun from Earth. Hence, it will take a few minutes for light waves to travel from Mars to the village on the Alaskan coast where you reside. They betray you. It turns out, however, that a gargantuan earthquake-induced tidal wave is going to kill you in fewer than the number of minutes it takes for light to travel from Mars to Earth.[20]

Here it is impossible (in a very strong sense) for you to experience something bad as a result of the betrayal. And yet it seems that you have been harmed. Certainly, if you are harmed by the betrayal in the Frankfurt-type betrayal example, then you are harmed by the betrayal in the Mars example. But it is impossible (short of a violation of the laws of physics) that you experience anything bad as a result of the betrayal in the Mars example.

It seems to me that it is correct to say that there is an interesting analogy between space and time with respect to death's badness. Just as one can be harmed by a spatially distant event, one can be harmed by a temporally distant event.[21] The Mars example drives this point home: one can be harmed by something that is spatially remote and from which one is causally isolated (barring violations of the laws of physics). But if this is so, then it is plausible to say that one can be harmed by temporally distant events (from which one is causally isolated). If you are harmed by the betrayal in the Mars case, why not also say you can be harmed by your death, even though the death occurs after you cease to exist?

These reflections, then, suggest simple answers to some of the most perplexing puzzles pertaining to the badness of death. Death is bad in virtue of being a *deprivation* of the good things in life. The subject of the misfortune of death is *you* (the individual who dies). The time of the misfortune is the *time during which you are dead*.[22] Just as some

[20] I am grateful to M. Otsuka for this example.

[21] For these points, see Silverstein. Silverstein believed that in order to sustain his analogy between space and time, he had to argue that the future "exists atemporally." But I wish to employ the analogy with space and time *without* making this further argument. I do not believe that one *needs* to establish the additional (highly contentious) fact about the future, in order to employ the analogy. For criticism of Silverstein here, and one alternative picture of the ontological status of future events, see: P. Yourgrau, "The Dead," *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1987), pp. 84–101; reprinted in Fischer (ed.), pp. 137–156. T. Nagel also suggests the analogy between time and space in the context of death, saying "For certain purposes it is possible to regard time as just another type of distance" (Nagel, p. 6).

[22] Thus, the conclusion I draw from the analogy between space and time in the context of death is different from the respective conclusions of Silverstein and Nagel. Silverstein believes that one is *atemporally* harmed by one's death. I believe that Nagel holds that the

misfortunes occur at a spatial distance and are causally isolated from you, other misfortunes occur at a temporal distance (and are causally isolated from you).[23]

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time of the harm of death is *indeterminate*. In contrast, I believe that the time of the harm is the time during which one is dead (of course, I am thereby committed to the view that one can be harmed during a time at which one does not exist).

[23] I thank M. Otsuka, D. Copp, H. Silverstein, A. Brueckner, and D. Zimmerman for their help. My work on this paper has been supported by a Fellowship for Independent Study and Research from the National Endowment for the Humanities (let us hope that the NEH does *not* die!). I read a version of this paper at the Western Washington State University Philosophy Conference, Bellingham, Washington in March, 1996. I benefited greatly from the stimulating discussion at this conference.