

**Resisting Epicurean Therapy:
On Why Death Is a Fitting Object of Fear**

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ABSTRACT

What is the fitting attitude one should have toward her own death? Or, to put it differently, what is it about death that makes it worthy of a certain attitude? The commonsense view is that death is something that merits fear because it is arguably the most terrible harm that a person can suffer. Surprisingly, however, this commonsense view about the fittingness of fear toward death has been challenged ever since the Hellenistic period. Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher, famously argued that death does not merit fear because it is not bad for the one who dies. Epicurus intended his argument to have therapeutic effects—he wanted people to live a pleasant life by ridding themselves of the fear of death and believed that the correct understanding of the nature of death enables us to do that. For this reason, I call any argument attempting to show that death is not worthy of fear an “Epicurean therapeutic argument” (ETA).

There are two kinds of ETAs. The traditional ETA holds that death does not merit fear because it is not bad for the person who dies. The contemporary ETA, on the other hand, acknowledges that death can in some special sense be bad for the one who dies, but it still denies that this special badness warrants fear. In light of these two kinds of ETAs, the primary goal of my dissertation is to defend the commonsense view that death is a fitting object of fear. I do this in two ways. First, I show that both the traditional and contemporary ETAs fail to establish that death is not worthy of fear. Second, I offer my own positive account of why death is a fitting object of fear.

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INTRODUCTION

Suppose there is no afterlife and a person becomes permanently nonexistent after death. What is the fitting attitude we should have toward death? Here “death” is understood as the transient *event* through which a person transitions from the state of being alive to the state of being dead and should be distinguished from the “process of dying”, which refers to the final phase of one’s life that usually involves pain and suffering. No doubt, a person’s death can bring about the suffering of those who are still alive (for example, parents often grieve the death of their beloved children). Given that suffering is in itself a bad thing, it seems evident that a person has a reason to fear or worry about her death *if* the people relying on her will suffer as a result of it. However, setting aside any potential impact that a person’s death might have on other survivors, what interests me is: What is the fitting attitude that a person should have toward her death from a *self-interested* perspective? Since the answer to this question is not obvious, it is a more philosophically interesting question.

Let me clarify my question by explaining what it is for an attitude to be *fitting*. In the contemporary discussion of normativity, fittingness is taken to be a normative standard by which our affective responses can be evaluated. According to such a standard, a response R on the part of a person S toward an object O is appropriate (or fitting) if and only if O has some feature that *merits*, or *is worthy of*, R on the part of S (Howard 2018). Fittingness is different from other normative standards, such as prudence or morality. A response may seem appropriate by the standard of fittingness, but not by prudence or morality. To illustrate, suppose Robert is being amused by a racist joke.

Suppose also that the joke is indeed amusing because it has some feature (for example, its punchline contains homophones) that merits amusement on the part of the person who hears it. In terms of fittingness, Robert's amusement seems justified because his amusement is directed at something amusing. But his amusement may seem inappropriate (or unwise) in the eyes of prudence, for Robert's being amused by the racist joke may cause his colleagues to ostracize him if they happen to be the targets of the joke. Moreover, being amused by the racist joke does not seem justified by moral standard either since the joke is, after all, racist.

Return to my question: What is the fitting attitude one should have toward her own death? Or, to put it differently, what is it about death that makes it worthy of a certain attitude? The commonsense view is that death is something that merits fear, and it merits fear because it is arguably the most terrible harm that a person can suffer. Surprisingly, however, this commonsense view about the fittingness of fear toward death has been challenged ever since the Hellenistic period. Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher, famously argued that "there is nothing fearful in the absence of life" because "death is nothing to us" (Epicurus, 1994, p. 29). Death is nothing to us, Epicurus thought, because it is not bad for the person who dies. Setting aside for the moment the details of Epicurus's argument for this claim, it should be noted that Epicurus did not provide the argument as a mere intellectual exercise. Instead, Epicurus intended his argument to have therapeutic effects—he wanted people to live a pleasant life by ridding themselves of the fear of death and believed that the correct understanding of the nature of death enables us

to do that. For this reason, I call any argument attempting to show that death is not worthy of fear an “Epicurean therapeutic argument” (ETA).¹

Broadly speaking, ETAs can be divided into two kinds: the “traditional Epicurean therapeutic argument”, and the “contemporary Epicurean therapeutic argument”. The traditional ETA, which is proposed by Epicurus and adopted by many contemporary Epicureans, holds that death does not merit fear because it is not bad for the person who dies. Given the intuitive assumption that an event merits fear *only if* it is bad, the traditional ETA can show that death is not worthy of fear by showing that death is not bad for the person who dies. On the other hand, the contemporary ETA, which is widely endorsed by prominent contemporary philosophers of death, acknowledges that death can in some special sense be bad for the person who dies, but it still denies that this special badness warrants fear.

In light of these two kinds of ETAs, the primary goal of my dissertation is to defend the commonsense view that death is a fitting object of fear. I do this in two ways. First, I show that both the traditional and contemporary ETAs fail to show that death is not worthy of fear. Second, I offer my own positive account of why death is a fitting object of fear. While my project does not provide a philosophical therapy to combat the fear of death, it sheds light on the nature of death by explaining why it is a fitting object of fear.

¹ I borrow this term from Nussbaum (1994).

Dissertation Overview

In Chapter One, I reject the traditional Epicurean therapeutic argument. Specifically, I focus on the Epicurean claim that death is not bad for the one who dies and mount an abductive, or inference to the best explanation, argument against it. I argue that we have reason to reject the Epicurean view about the badness of death based on the conviction that killing is wrong. This is because positing that death is bad for the person who dies can better explain the wrongness of killing than positing the Epicurean view that death is not bad for the person who dies. Thus, by abductive reasoning, the conviction that killing is wrong lends rational support to the belief that death is bad for the person who dies.

In Chapter Two, I focus on the contemporary Epicurean therapeutic argument. Proponents of this argument typically disagree with Epicurus on whether death is bad for the person who dies. Most of them subscribe to deprivationism about the badness of death—the view that death can be *comparatively* bad for the person who dies in virtue of preventing the person from having more good things in life. Despite this disagreement, many prominent deprivationists still agree with the Epicurean view that death is *not* a fitting object of fear because they think comparative badness does not merit fear. I consider their arguments for the claim that comparative badness does not merit fear and show that none of them is successful. So, given deprivationism about death, it is *possible* for death as merely comparatively bad to merit fear on the part of the person who dies.

The first two chapters conclude the negative part of my project. Chapters Three and Four turn to the positive part—spelling out why death can be a fitting object of fear. More specifically, I aim to explain why, given deprivationism about the badness of death,

death can merit fear. But to do this, I need to first provide some defense for the deprivation account of the badness of death. And this is the task of Chapter Three.

As I mentioned above, deprivationism is roughly the view that death can be bad for the person who dies in virtue of *preventing* the person from having more good things in life. This prevention relation is typically cashed out in counterfactual terms: a person's death prevents her from having more good things in life just in case *had* that death not occurred when it did, she *would have* enjoyed more good things in life. When prevention is understood in this way, it becomes clear that deprivationism is committed to this idea: an event constitutes a bad thing or harm for a person if and only if the person would have been better off on balance had that event not occurred. In the contemporary theorizing about harm, this idea has been referred to as the "Counterfactual Comparative Account" of harm. Deprivationism can thus be regarded as the application of the Counterfactual Comparative Account to the explanation of the badness of death. So, in Chapter Three, I defend the deprivation account by defending its underlying idea—the Counterfactual Comparative Account of harm. I survey all the leading accounts of harm and argue that the Counterfactual Comparative Account emerges as the best account in the literature.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I explain why death can be a fitting object of fear given deprivationism about the badness of death. Drawing on the criticism I make in Chapter Two, I propose the following view: a person's death merits self-interested fear because her death is comparatively bad for her and prevents some events whose occurrence would have contributed to her projects. Since projects are the most important determinants of

the quality of a person's life, if a comparatively bad death prevents a person from realizing her projects, it would merit fear on the part of that person.

CHAPTER ONE: REJECTING TRADITIONAL EPICUREAN THERAPEUTIC ARGUMENT

In this chapter, I aim to reject the traditional Epicurean therapeutic argument (ETA). Here is the traditional ETA in outline form:

1. An event merits self-interested fear on the part of a person *only if* it is bad for that person. (Commonsense assumption)
2. Death is not bad for the person who dies. (Epicureanism about the badness of death)
3. Thus, death does not merit self-interested fear on the part of the person who dies.

Premise (1) is intuitively compelling. So, what I will do is reject premise (2); that is, I will reject Epicureanism about the badness of death.

Why does Epicurus think death *cannot* be bad for the one who dies? This is because, as a hedonist, Epicurus thinks only negative experiences or things that cause them can be bad for people. But death, understood as the transient event through which a person transitions from the state of being alive to the state of being dead, involves no negative experiences. So, in Epicurus' view, death can never be bad for the one who dies.

Most anti-Epicurean philosophers reject the Epicurean view about the badness of death by spelling out why death can be bad for people even though it involves no negative experiences. Those who adopt this approach typically end up defending deprivationism about the badness of death. While I believe in deprivationism, my argument against premise (2)—that is, Epicureanism about the badness of death—does

not take the form of defending deprivationism.² From an argumentative point of view, this approach is more effective because people who are agnostic on the truth of deprivationism can also agree with my position.

Instead of directly defending deprivationism, my argument against Epicureanism about the badness of death appeals to the widely perceived tension between Epicureanism and the commonsense judgment that it is morally wrong to kill a person (McMahan 1988, p. 34; Silverstein 1980, p. 413). Many philosophers have noticed that what would intuitively explain why killing is wrong is that death is bad for the one who dies. But if Epicureans are right in claiming that death cannot be bad for the one who dies, then a “critical component” of the explanation of why killing is wrong would be missing (McMahan 2002, p. 95). Based on this observation, I motivate an abductive, or inference to the best explanation, argument against Epicureanism about the badness of death. My argument involves the defense of these two claims: *that death is bad for the one who dies, if true, would explain why killing is wrong* and *Epicureans do not have a better, or equally good, explanation of why killing is wrong*. If these two claims are true, then by abductive reasoning, we have a reason to believe that Epicureanism about the badness of death is false.

Before defending these two claims, let me clarify how abductive reasoning works and why it is able to generate rational beliefs. To be clear, I do not offer a full account of such reasoning, but just enough to motivate my argument.

² Although I do not intend to provide a direct defense for deprivationism, an important part of my argument involves rejecting an objection directed at deprivationism.

1.1 The Abductive Argument

Consider a textbook example of abductive reasoning. Suppose while walking down the hallway, you notice that there are feet exposed under the curtain. Based on this observation, you infer that someone is hiding behind the curtain.³ The inference can be expressed in the following form:

(P) There are feet exposed under the curtain.

Therefore,

(C) Someone is hiding behind the curtain.

This inference is not deductively valid since (P) does not *necessitate* (C). But intuitively, we all agree that it is legitimate to draw such an inference. We think belief in (C) is justified by belief in (P). If so, then we may ask: what makes such an inference legitimate?

One might suggest that the reason why belief in (P) supports belief in (C) is that the person who draws this inference has observed many similar phenomena in the past, that is, whenever there were feet exposed under the curtain, there was always someone hiding behind it. So, according to this suggestion, the legitimacy of the abductive inference is grounded in past observations. This suggestion is not satisfactory, however. Suppose it is the first time the person sees feet exposed under the curtain. It is still intuitive to regard the belief that there is someone hiding behind the curtain as justified

³ This example is from Pritchard (2018, p. 93).

by the first-time observation. Thus, what grounds abductive reasoning must be different from what grounds inductive reasoning.⁴

Philosophers have pointed out that the legitimacy of abductive reasoning is grounded in the potential explanatory power of the conclusion (Lipton 2004). In our example, the reason why (P) is evidence for believing (C) is that (C), if true, would explain why (P) is true. So, the explanation that would obtain between (P) and (C) if both were true is relevant to whether belief in (C) is justified by belief in (P).⁵ (I follow the standard assumption that only facts can explain or get explained. So, the proposition that, if true, would explain the target phenomenon is just a *potential* explanation. But from here on, I will usually omit the qualifier “potential”, for the sake of simplicity.)

But what if there are many *competing* explanations that would all explain the target phenomenon? In our example, that there are dismembered feet in the hallway, if true, would also explain why there are feet exposed under the curtain. How should one decide among different explanations? Which explanation should one believe in? In response, we need to determine which explanation *best* explains the target phenomenon. Usually, if an explanation entails a counterintuitive result, then it is not a good explanation in the sense that it is less likely to be true, since it fails to cohere with what we take to be the case. But how should we decide among explanations if they are all

⁴ One might suspect that abductive reasoning is ultimately a form of inductive reasoning. I am not able to address this issue here. Instead, I stick with the standard assumption that abduction and induction are two forms of reasoning.

⁵ See McCain and Poston (2017) for an excellent defense of this claim.

equally compelling? According to Peter Lipton (2001), explanations are better (in the sense of being more likely to be true) when they “explain more types of phenomena, explain them with greater precision, provide more information about underlying mechanisms, unify apparently disparate phenomena, or simplify our overall picture of the world” (p. 106). It would take me too far afield to explore these criteria. But as it will become clear, I do not need them to reject the Epicurean account of why killing is wrong because I will show that the Epicurean account entails counterintuitive results, so it is not on a par with the commonsense anti-Epicurean account that holds that death is bad for the one who dies.

Notice that we do not need an account of how explanation works, in order to employ the abductive reasoning or the inference to the best explanation (Lipton 2001, p. 100). What is required is that we have the ability to discover explanations (and to determine whether one is better than another). It is common to assume that we have such an ability since we can tell whether a “because” claim is true (or more likely to be true than another). This assumption is not controversial, at least not in the type of non-causal explanations I am concerned with here. Many philosophers think that whether a non-causal explanation obtains is something we can “literally know” (Audi 2012, p. 120).

Having understood why abductive reasoning can produce justified beliefs, let us return to the main theme. In this chapter, I defend the following anti-Epicurean argument:

(K) Killing a person is wrong.

Therefore,

(D) Death is bad for the one who dies.

In my argument, (K) refers to the judgments that we make in ordinary situations where killing is evidently wrong. There are circumstances where it is controversial whether killing the person(s) in question is wrong, such as assisted suicide, or abortion. My argument is not concerned with those controversial cases.

Since my argument is intended as an abductive argument against Epicureanism about the badness of death, its success depends on these two claims:

P1. That death is bad for the one who dies explains why killing is wrong.

P2. Epicureans lack a better, or equally good, explanation of why killing is wrong.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to defending P1 and P2. Section 1.2 defends P1 by responding to a prominent objection to it. Section 1.3 defends P2 by rejecting as unsatisfactory two existing Epicurean accounts of why killing is wrong. If my argument is successful, then based on the conviction that killing is wrong alone, we have reason to favor the commonsense anti-Epicurean view about death. Thus, other things being equal, the belief in the wrongness of killing gives us a reason to reject Epicureanism about the badness of death. Since Epicureanism about the badness of death is the second premise of the traditional ETA, my abductive argument gives us a reason to reject the traditional ETA.

1.2 In Defense of P1

It is widely thought that the fact that it is wrong to kill a person is not a brute fact. Rather, it is a fact that has an explanation.⁶ But what explains why killing is wrong? Many philosophers think that killing is wrong *because* death is bad for the one who dies. The following remarks by Jeff McMahan (2002) reflect this common view:

In those instances in which killing is wrong, it seems that it must be a critical component of the explanation of why it is wrong that it causes something dreadful to happen to the victim: it causes him to die. It is, indeed, natural to suppose that it is because it is normally such a terrible misfortune to die that murder is, in general, the most grievously immoral of crimes. Murder is the most egregious crime because what it inflicts is, in general, the gravest harm: death. (p. 95)

The common view expressed by McMahan does not entail that the *only* reason why killing is wrong is that death is bad for the one who dies, which may have an implausible implication that killing a person is not wrong when her death is not bad for her. Rather, the common view should be understood as claiming that any account that fails to include the fact that death is bad for the one who dies leaves out something important about why killing is wrong.

⁶ The idea of *basic moral certainties* defended in Pleasants (2008) may be used to challenge the explainability of why killing is wrong. For a criticism of Pleasants' argument, see Kusch (2022). I will not address the debate here. I take it as an intuitive assumption that the wrongness of killing can be explained by other facts.

The common view is incompatible with Epicureanism because it accepts that death is bad for the one who dies, and for this reason, it has come under criticism from Epicureans. The aim of this section is to buttress this view by rejecting a prominent objection to it.

Typically, proponents of this objection proceed by noting that anti-Epicurean philosophers generally endorse deprivationism about the badness of death.⁷ According to this account, death is bad for the person who dies if and only if (and because) it *prevents* the person from enjoying, on balance, more intrinsically good things that she would otherwise have enjoyed had she not died when she did.⁸ And the more intrinsically good things a death prevents from happening to the person, the worse the death is for the person who dies. These proponents then go on to argue that when the deprivation account is conjoined with the view that killing is wrong because death is bad for the one who dies, a counterintuitive result would arise. This kind of reasoning can be found in Burley (2010):

...if the wrongness of killing were internally related to the badness of death, it is plausible that we should expect it to track the badness of death fairly closely; that

⁷ See Bradly (2009) for a prominent defense of the deprivation account.

⁸ Deprivation theorists understand “prevention” in counterfactual terms: Event A prevents event B from happening if and only if A occurs and B does not occur, and had A not occurred, B would have occurred. What is intrinsically good for a person depends on what kind of theory of well-being one endorses. A hedonist like Epicurus would hold that the only things that can be good (or bad) for people are pleasure (or pain). But conceptually speaking, the deprivation account can be combined with other theories of well-being.

is, wherever the death of one person, Smith, is worse for the deceased than the death of another person, Jones, we should expect that, were the two deaths to have been brought about by relevantly similar acts of killing, the act of killing Smith would be morally worse than that of killing Jones. But does this account reflect the sorts of judgments that we do in fact make, and which appear right to make? It does not seem so. (Burley 2010, pp.77–78)

Burley takes for granted that it is counterintuitive to hold that in the above scenario killing Smith is more seriously wrong than killing Jones. If it is indeed counterintuitive, then anti-Epicurean philosophers must admit that it is not the case that killing is wrong because death is bad for the one who dies. Otherwise, they would have to give up the deprivation account, which is widely thought to be the most prominent account of the badness of death.⁹

The kind of criticism proposed by Burley is unconvincing, however. First, it is disputable whether the conclusion that killing one person may be more seriously wrong than killing another is counterintuitive. The alleged counterintuitiveness may arise from a particular way of understanding wrongness. If we treat the property of wrongness as equivalent to the property of impermissibility, then surely, it does not make sense to say that one action can be more seriously wrong than another since no impermissible action is more impermissible than another. But this is not how philosophers working in this area

⁹ Of course, it is possible for anti-Epicureans to respond to this challenge by pursuing other accounts of the badness of death. But I will not explore this approach here. Part of the reason is that I find deprivationism very compelling.

understand wrongness. Instead of equating wrongness with impermissibility, they treat the wrongness of an action as the action's wrong-making features (Lippert-Rasmussen 2007, p.717; McMahan 2002, p. 190). That is, what it is for X-ing to be wrong is for X-ing to have features that provide (*pro tanto*) reasons to disfavor X-ing. Here, "disfavoring" is an umbrella term that cover negative attitudes in general. When one disfavors something, one finds it unattractive, or worthless.¹⁰ This understanding allows wrongness to differ in degrees since the reasons that disfavor an action can differ in strength: X-ing is more seriously wrong than Y-ing just in case the reasons to disfavor X-ing are stronger than the reasons to disfavor Y-ing. Moreover, this understanding can account for impermissibility: X-ing is impermissible just in case there are overall reasons to disfavor X-ing. Understood in this way, wrongness is a property that can vary in degrees. If so, then it may not seem so counterintuitive to hold that one killing can be more seriously wrong than another.¹¹

To be sure, some philosophers note that the intuition that no single killing is more seriously wrong than another is that every person is equal (McMahan 2002, p. 235). So, they may argue that while wrongness is a property that can vary in degrees, it is still not the case that killing one person can be more seriously wrong than another. It would take me too far afield to fully assess this position. But suppose, for argument's sake, that it is

¹⁰ Notice that "disfavoring" should *not* be understood in a thin, behavioral sense that when one disfavors X-ing over Y-ing, one prefers Y-ing over X-ing.

¹¹ See Lippert-Rasmussen (2007) for an account of why killing one person *can* be more seriously wrong than killing another.

true that no one killing is more seriously wrong than another. We are thus rationally required to reject at least one premise in the reasoning presented by Burley. Those who argue on behalf of Burley would reject the claim that killing is wrong because death is bad for the one who dies. But I argue that there is equally good reason to reject the assumption appealed to by Burley. If my argument is plausible, then anti-Epicureans do not necessarily need to give up the claim that killing is wrong because death is bad for the one who dies, in order to maintain that all killings are equally wrong.

The assumption I want to challenge in Burley's reasoning is this: the degree of the wrongness of killing is expected to track "fairly closely" the degree of the badness of a person's death *if* what explains why killing the person is wrong is that her death is bad for her. This assumption is questionable, since it is possible that a is F because b is G, but the degree of F-ness does not closely track the degree of G-ness. In our case, if killing is wrong because death is bad, then it is still possible that the degree of wrongness does not closely track the degree of badness. Consider, for example, the claim that Smith is feeling pain because Smith's brain is being stimulated. Does it follow from this claim that when the amount of stimulation increases, the amount of pain also increases? Not necessarily. Perhaps Smith gets distracted, so he does not feel more pain even though the amount of stimulation increases. If this example makes sense, then we have reason to believe that it is possible that the wrongness of killing is explained by the badness of death, but the degree of the wrongness of killing a person does not vary with the degree of the badness of the person's death. Thus, we have reason to reject the assumption that drives Burley's argument.

A critic might reply that the example I gave is an example of “a is F *partly* because b is G”. She might claim that when a is F *solely* because b is G, we should expect F-ness to track G-ness “fairly closely”. In response, it should be noted that in order for this reply to work, it must be assumed that anti-Epicureans are committed to the view that the *only* reason why killing a person is wrong is that her death is bad for her. But as mentioned earlier, we should not ascribe this view to anti-Epicurean philosophers. According to McMahan (2002, p. 95), what is commonly held among them is that death’s being bad for the one who dies is “a critical component” of the explanation of why killing is wrong. This position is compatible with there being some factors, other than the badness of death, that are relevant to why killing is wrong.¹²

In sum, whether the view that killing one person can be more seriously wrong than killing another is counterintuitive or not, Burley’s argument does not undermine the intuitive compelling claim that killing is wrong because death is bad for the one who dies.

1.3 In Defense of P2

In the last section, I defended P1—that death is bad for the one who dies explains why killing is wrong—by responding to a prominent objection to it. Now, I turn to the second part of my defense, which is to support P2—that Epicureans lack a better, or equally good, explanation of why killing is wrong.

¹² Perhaps how well a person lives is also relevant to why killing the person is wrong. See Lippert-Rasmussen (2007, p. 735) for a discussion of this idea.

The approaches to accounting for why killing is wrong can be roughly divided into two kinds: the right-based approach, and the welfare-based approach. Proponents of the right-based approach usually take for granted that “we have rights against others that they not injure us, knock us unconscious, or kill us” (Hanser 2013, p. 398). So, according to the right-based approach, killing a person is wrong because it violates her right against being killed. Proponents of the welfare-based approach, on the other hand, seek to explain why killing is wrong in terms of the effects that death has on a person’s well-being. Typically, the welfare-based approach holds that killing inflicts the loss of one’s life that “deprives one of all the experiences, activities, projects, and enjoyments that would otherwise have constituted one’s future” (Marquis 1989, p. 189). Based on this division, it is expected that an Epicurean account of why killing is wrong must fall within either of these approaches. My argument is that whichever approach Epicureans adopt, they cannot successfully explain why killing is wrong.

Consider, first, the right-based approach. An Epicurean who adopts this approach will, presumably, hold that killing is wrong because it constitutes an infringement of a person’s right against being killed, *but* death is not bad for the person who is killed. Can these two claims be coherently maintained? I do not think so. Notice that killing essentially involves the death of a person. So, if a person’s right against being killed is infringed, this infringement must be constituted by the event of her death; otherwise, what is infringed would not be her *right against being killed*. Now, we may ask: is the infringement of the right against being killed ever bad for the person whose right it is? If the answer is “yes”, then it is *possible* for a person’s death to be bad for her in virtue of

constituting an infringement of her right against being killed. This result would contradict the Epicurean view that death *cannot* be bad for the one who dies.

To avoid the contradiction, Epicureans must answer “no”. That is, they must insist that the infringement of the right against being killed is *never* bad for the person whose right it is. So, they must say that even if death constitutes an infringement of a person’s right against being killed, death is never bad for the person because the infringement of the right against being killed is never bad for the person who is killed. But this is extremely counterintuitive. Of course, the point of human rights is *not solely* about protecting people from the things that are bad for them (Hanser 2013, p. 398). But this does not entail that there can be some rights whose violation is never bad for us. If the violation of the right against being killed were in no way bad for us, it would be mysterious why we care so much about protecting and refraining from infringing this right. Thus, I submit that Epicureans cannot explain why killing is wrong by adopting the right-based approach since they would need to rely on a highly implausible view regarding the badness of the infringement of the right against being killed.

The option left for Epicureans is to account for the wrongness of killing by appeal to how death affects a person’s well-being without holding that death is bad for the person who dies. David Hershenov (2007) adopts this approach in defending what he calls “a more palatable Epicureanism”. While agreeing with deprivation theorists that death (at least sometimes) prevents a person from having a good life that he would otherwise have had had he not died when he did, Hershenov argues that “there is no entailment from the fact that more life would be good for someone to the proposition that

death would be bad for him” (2007, p. 177).¹³ So, in Hershenov’s view, deprivation theorists are mistaken in claiming that death is bad for the one who dies in virtue of preventing her from having a good life. Nevertheless, Hershenov thinks what explains why killing is wrong is that it prevents a person from enjoying more life:

...someone’s killer has done something terribly wrong. This wrongness lies not in harming the deceased, but in *preventing* him from enjoying more life. Preventing someone from more life can be a terrible act and deserve to be severely punished. (Hershenov 2007, p. 177, emphasis in original)

Stephen Rosenbaum (1996) offers a similar account of the wrongness of killing. According to Rosenbaum, killing is wrong because “it is not useful to the general structure of human life”, or not “useful for helping people live well” (Rosenbaum 1996, p. 396). I will show that both Hershenov’s and Rosenbaum’s accounts are implausible.

Recall that the wrongness of an action is explained by the action’s reason-providing features. That is, if an action has some feature that provides a reason to disfavor that action, then that feature is what makes the action wrong, and vice versa. On Rosenbaum’s view, killing is wrong because it is not useful for helping people live well. This entails that *not being useful for helping people live well* is a feature that provides reason to disfavor killing and thus makes killing wrong. But this is implausible. An action’s *not being useful for helping people live well* does not constitute a reason to

¹³ It is up for debate whether Hershenov succeeds in rejecting the entailment in question. Hershenov’s argument relies on the claim that dead people lack well-being level. But see Bradley (2009, pp. 98–105) for a defense of the view that dead people do not lack well-being level, but have well-being level of zero.

disfavor it. To illustrate, my action of rubbing my hair at this moment does not appear to be useful for helping people live well. But there is no reason to disfavor my rubbing my hair merely in virtue of its lacking usefulness in helping people live well. This shows that the feature of not being useful for helping people live well is not a feature that makes an action wrong, for it is not a feature to disfavor an action that has it. So, Rosenbaum's account misidentifies the wrong-making feature of killing.

Hershenov's account avoids the problem that faces Rosenbaum's. For Hershenov, the wrongness of killing lies in preventing one from enjoying more life. And *preventing one from enjoying more life* does seem to be a feature that makes an action wrong, for if an action has the feature of preventing one from enjoying more life, then this constitutes a reason to disfavor that action. But I will show that Hershenov's account suffers from another problem.

On Hershenov's view, killing is wrong in virtue of having the reason-providing feature of preventing one from enjoying more life. But the reason why killing has the feature of preventing one from enjoying more life is that killing causes the death of a person. So, death must also have the feature of preventing one from enjoying more life. Otherwise, it would not make sense to say that killing has the reason-providing feature it does. But, as noted by many theorists, death merits negative attitudes such as sadness (Draper 1999) or lament (Timmerman 2016) on the part of those who die in virtue of

preventing them from enjoying more life.¹⁴ So, it follows that death's preventing one from enjoying more life provides a reason for its victim to disfavor it, where "disfavoring" refers to negative attitudes in general.

Hershenov's account implies that death's preventing a person from enjoying more life gives the person herself a reason to disfavor her death. But is it plausible to maintain this claim together with the claim that death is not bad for the one who dies? I argue that it is not. Philosophers have noted a necessary co-extension between the property of value and the property of having reason-providing features—that is, whenever an object has features that provide reasons to (dis)favor it, it is (dis)valuable in some way, and vice versa (Suikkanen 2005, p. 525). A typical example would be that I have a reason to disfavor the event of my stubbing my toes because it causes a lot of pain, and my stubbing my toes is also bad for me because it causes a lot of pain. When we encounter an object that has a reason-providing feature, this object always has some negative or positive value. Yet, Hershenov's account, if true, would entail a counterintuitive result by producing an exception to the intuitive necessary co-extension. Hershenov explicitly claims that death cannot be bad for the one who dies, but his account implies that death's preventing a person from enjoying more life provides the person herself a reason to disfavor her death. So, given Hershenov's view, death is something that has the property of having a reason-providing feature but no corresponding value-property.

¹⁴ Bradley (2021) is the only philosopher who holds that death does not merit any negative attitudes in virtue of preventing one from enjoying more life. I will consider and reject Bradley's view in the next chapter.

To argue on behalf of Hershenov, a critic might claim that death's preventing one from enjoying more life is a feature that makes death *morally, or non-relationally*, bad, as opposed to bad *for the one who dies*.¹⁵ So, Hershenov's account does not introduce an exception to the co-extension between the property of value and the property of having reason-providing features because he could hold that whenever a death has the alleged reason-providing feature, it is always bad in the moral, non-relational sense, as opposed to the relational sense of "bad for".

In response, I argue that death's preventing one from enjoying more life is not always a morally-bad-making feature since it is possible for a death not to be morally bad but still have the feature of preventing one from enjoying more life. Consider a case in which a criminal is being executed and had he not been executed he would have gone on to live a good life. The criminal's death thus prevents him from enjoying more life, and presumably, this fact constitutes a reason for the criminal to disfavor his death. Despite this, it is not morally bad that the criminal dies. So, we have a case in which a death has the reason-providing feature of preventing one from enjoying more life but is not morally bad. Hence, one cannot defend Hershenov's account by arguing that death is always morally, non-relationally bad in virtue of having the feature of preventing one from enjoying more life.

Another possible response by Hershenov is to question the co-extension. If it is possible to find an object that has a reason-providing feature but no value of any sort, then it would be an illusion that there is any necessary co-extension between the property

¹⁵ See Rønnow-Rasmussen (2013) for further discussion of this distinction.

of value and the property of having reason-providing features. Jonathan Dancy takes himself to have found such an example:

Suppose that I promise my children that I will tie my right shoelaces before my left shoelaces on alternate days of the week if they will do their homework without fuss. One can imagine arguing that though I ought to tie my right shoelaces before my left shoelaces today, since I did the opposite yesterday, my doing so has no value of any form. (Dancy 2000, p. 168)

In the example, Dancy's tying his left shoelaces before his right shoelaces yesterday has a reason-providing feature, that is, gives him a reason to tie his right shoelaces before his left shoelaces today. But Dancy thinks the event of his tying his left shoelaces before his right shoelaces "has no value of any form".

Dancy's example has been shown to be unconvincing, however. Jussi Suikkanen (2005, p. 531) has pointed out that Dancy's tying his left shoelaces before his right shoelaces is valuable, it is just not *intrinsically* valuable. Since the series of tying shoelaces on alternate days of the week contributes to the children's education, which is taken to be intrinsically valuable in the scenario, Suikkanen thinks the events of tying shoelaces have instrumental value and, for this reason, Dancy's example fails to show that an object can have a reason-providing feature but have "no value of any form". Suikkanen's reply preserves the intuitive co-extension. So, unless there is a genuine counterexample to the co-extension in question, it remains counterintuitive to maintain that death has some feature that provides a reason for the person who dies to disfavor it but is not bad for the person who dies.

Let me consider a final possible reply. One might respect the necessary co-extension by granting that death is of negative value in virtue of preventing a person from enjoying more life but insist that death cannot be said to be “bad” merely in virtue of having this feature. A proposal like this can be found in the writing of Aaron Smuts (2012), who argues that death is not bad but only “less good”. In response, insofar as both Epicureans and anti-Epicureans agree that death is of negative value in virtue of preventing a person from enjoying more life, I think there is no real disagreement between both parties. Given that both parties agree that the value status of death is negative rather than neutral, what they disagree with each other is how to refer to an object that has a negative value status, rather than whether the object in question has a negative value status at all.¹⁶ Deprivation theorists usually use qualifiers like “extrinsic”, “comparative”, or “instrumental” to describe the kind of disvalue that death has, while Epicureans like Smuts can use “less good”. Thus, by arguing that death is only less good for the one who dies, Epicureans merely appear to provide an explanation of why killing is wrong without claiming that death is bad for the one who dies. In fact, there is no substantial difference between the anti-Epicurean account and the Epicurean account that claims that death is “less good” for the one who dies, so these two accounts are not *competing* accounts of why killing is wrong.¹⁷

¹⁶ Smuts (2012, p. 220) also admits that death’s being “less good” does not entail that it is prudentially neutral.

¹⁷ Timmerman (2019) mounts a similar argument against Smuts’ Epicurean account of the value of death.

In this section, I have defended P2—that Epicureans lack a better, or equally good, explanation of why killing is wrong. I first showed that Epicureans cannot account for why killing is wrong by adopting the right-based approach since they would commit themselves to a highly implausible view about the badness of the violation of human rights. Next, I considered whether Epicureans can succeed in explaining why killing is wrong by pursuing the welfare-based approach. Specifically, I assessed the existing Epicurean accounts by Rosenbaum and Hershenov. My conclusion is that both are unsatisfactory. Thus, Epicureans fare no better by adopting the welfare-based approach.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have defended an abductive argument, or inference to the best explanation argument, against Epicureanism about the badness of death. I have shown that the wrongness of killing is better explained by the commonsense view that death is bad for the one who dies than by the Epicurean account that holds that death cannot be bad for the one who dies. Given that the explanatory considerations have an evidential impact, the belief that death is bad for the one who dies is justified by the conviction that killing is wrong. Thus, the conviction that killing is wrong constitutes an independent reason to reject Epicureanism about the badness of death, which is the second premise of the traditional ETA.

CHAPTER TWO: REJECTING CONTEMPORARY EPICUREAN THERAPEUTIC ARGUMENT

In this chapter, I aim to reject the contemporary Epicurean therapeutic argument. Unlike the traditional ETA, the contemporary ETA is proposed by deprivationists who hold that death can be bad for the person who dies. Specifically, they hold that death can be comparatively bad for the person who dies in the sense that had the person not died when she did, she would have been better off on balance. Despite disagreeing with Epicureans on whether death can be bad at all, most deprivationists agree with Epicureans that death is *not* a fitting object of fear. This is because these deprivationists contend that comparative badness does not merit fear. Here is the contemporary ETA in outline form:

1. Death can and only be comparatively bad for the person who dies.
(Deprivationism)
2. Comparative badness does not merit fear.
3. Therefore, death does not merit fear.¹⁸

As I mentioned before, I endorse deprivationism, so I will not challenge premise (1) of the contemporary ETA. What I will do instead is to reject premise (2)—that comparative

¹⁸ One may notice that this argument implicitly relies on a premise—death does not have other features that appear to merit fear, except being comparatively bad. Surely, this premise is not obviously true and may require further defense. However, I will not challenge those who endorse this argument, mostly deprivationists, on this point. I will show that death's being comparatively bad for the one who dies makes death worthy of fear, regardless of whether it has some other fearful features.

badness does not merit fear. I argue that all the deprivationist arguments for premise (2) are unsuccessful. So, it is possible for comparative badness to merit fear.

Before I proceed to reject premise (2) of the contemporary ETA, let me first clarify deprivationism and the comparative value.

2.1 Deprivationism

Deprivationism is roughly the view that death is bad for the person who dies if and only if (and because) the person's death *prevents* her from having an additional period of life that is overall good for her.¹⁹ This prevention relation can be cashed out in counterfactual terms: if the person had not died when she did, she would have, on balance, enjoyed more goods of life. Understood in this way, death's value is not intrinsic but extrinsic since its value depends on the value of the things it prevents from happening.

Roughly speaking, when some value bearer X, whether it be an event or state of affairs, has *intrinsic* value, X is valuable in itself and its value does not depend on anything else. Episodes of pleasure (or pain) are generally taken to be the things that are intrinsically good (or bad) for a person.²⁰ On the other hand, when X's value is *extrinsic*,

¹⁹ When a person's death prevents her from enjoying good things in life, we can also say that her death *deprives* her of those good things. This is how the deprivation account got its name. But it is worth stressing that the deprivation account does not entail that death is *always* bad for the one who dies. In some cases, death can be good for a person when its occurrence prevents the person from undergoing further pain and suffering.

²⁰ The present discussion concerns personal value, that is, things being good or bad *for* a person. So, what is *valuable* should always be understood as what is *valuable for* a person.

X is valuable by virtue of standing in some relation to other valuable things. Further distinctions can be made depending on what relation is at play. In cases where X *causally* contributes to something intrinsically good (or bad) for a person, X can be said to be *instrumentally* good (or bad) for the person. But causal relation is not the only relation in which the value bearers can stand to each other. The deprivation theorists have identified a unique counterfactual relation—called “prevention”—that death bears to what is intrinsically valuable for the person who dies. According to the deprivation account, a person’s death is bad for her just in case it *prevents* her from enjoying more good things in life—more precisely, the person *would have* enjoyed more intrinsically good things in life *had* her death not occurred. Since we can make sense of the badness of a person’s death only in comparison to what would otherwise have happened to the person had she not died, we can say that the badness of death is, in this sense, *comparative* and, more generally, that some X is comparatively bad (or good) for a person just in case had X not occurred, more intrinsically good (or bad) things would have happened to her.

Philosophers have used different terms to refer to the value generated from the prevention relation. Travis Timmerman (2022) uses “extrinsic value”, while Ben Bradley (2021) prefers “instrumental value”. Here my usage is in accord with the usage by Kai Draper (2013a, 2013b), who uses “comparative value” to designate the kind of value that a thing obtains by preventing another thing from happening. Despite this terminological difference, deprivation theorists generally agree with each other that death is, and can only be, comparatively bad in the sense described above, and more importantly, they believe that mere comparative badness does not make death a fitting object of fear.

In the rest of this chapter, I reject the two central arguments that deprivationists have used to support the premise (2) of the contemporary ETA. The first kind of argument, which is proposed by Bradley (2021), states that our attitudes would be inappropriate or unfitting if we respond to events that only have comparative value, such as the event of one's death. The second kind of argument, which can be found in the writings of Timmerman (2022) and Draper (2013a, 2013b), holds that comparative badness does not merit fear, so death, as merely comparatively bad, does not merit fear.

Before I begin, let me make some clarificatory remarks on fear as an emotional attitude. In my discussion, fear is a kind of emotional attitude that can be directed toward events or states of affairs. Some critics might argue that death cannot be an object of fear because the event of one's death fails to satisfy certain conceptual constraints on what counts as an object of fear. For example, it might be required that one can fear something *only if* one does not believe what she fears is certain to happen. In other words, fearing X entails being uncertain about the occurrence of X. But presumably, everyone regards her own death as a certainty. So, conceptually speaking, no one can fear her own death. Philosophers interested in the fear of death, however, do not accept all the alleged conceptual constraints on fearing death. They think an event, even if believed to be inevitable, can be a fitting object of fear so long as it is "sufficiently intrinsically bad" (Timmerman 2022, p. 385). I agree with these philosophers that the necessary condition for fearing X need not include that X is uncertain to happen. What I disagree with them is taking the condition that X is intrinsically bad to be necessary for fittingly fearing X,

since doing so would preclude anything that is merely comparatively bad, such as death, from being a fitting object of fear.

2.2 Comparative Value and Attitudes in General

Bradley (2021) argues for the thesis that one's attitudes should not track the comparative value, but only the intrinsic value, of an event, or otherwise, one would have inappropriate attitudes toward that event.²¹ This thesis, if true, would support premise (2) of the contemporary ETA. This is because if comparative badness does merit any emotional attitudes, then *ipso facto* it does not merit fear. Three examples are used by Bradley to support the thesis that no attitude responding to the comparative value of an event is appropriate. In this section, I examine these examples in detail and argue that they all fail to support this thesis.

The first example appearing in Bradley's argument is adapted from Draper's (2013a, p. 299; 2013b, p. 78) Bjorn and Sven's house of massage. Consider a situation where a person is enjoying a pleasant massage given by Bjorn, which, under the hedonist assumption, is an intrinsically good thing. And suppose that the person would have enjoyed an equally good massage given by Sven had she not received the Bjorn massage. According to Bradley (and the definition of prevention mentioned in section 1), the Bjorn

²¹ More precisely, Bradley thinks the only attitude we should have toward death is the attitude of indifference. So, for him, any positive or negative attitudes would be unfitting.

message *prevents* the Sven message from happening.²² Now, given that an event's comparative value is determined by the value of what it prevents from happening, the Bjorn message would have a comparative disvalue because it prevents something intrinsically good, that is, the Sven message, from happening. For the sake of argument, Bradley supposes that our attitudes toward an event are a function of both its intrinsic and comparative values, and that whether a person should have positive, negative, or neutral attitudes toward an event would depend on whether that person regards the event as having positive, negative, or zero value. In the message case, if the customer takes into account both the intrinsic and comparative values of the Bjorn message, then she should be neutral about it. However, Bradley thinks it is inappropriate to have only a neutral attitude toward something that is intrinsically good. For him, the intuitively correct verdict is that the customer has a positive attitude toward the Bjorn message. Bradley thus traces this error back to the idea that our attitudes should also respond to the comparative value of an event, since if the customer attends solely to the intrinsic value of the Bjorn message, she would have a positive, rather than neutral, attitude toward it.

I admit that the message example shows that we should not *always* consider the comparative value of an event. But I do not think it establishes that *all* of our attitudes will be unfitting if they are also directed toward comparative value, which is what Bradley needs in arguing that comparatively bad events like death do not merit fear. If the

²² Bradley defines "prevention" in counterfactual terms, which accords with the usage by deprivation theorists described in section 1: Event A prevents Event B from happening if and only if A occurs and B does not occur, and B would have occurred had A not occurred.

message example does establish the claim Bradley wants, it would be because Bradley has assumed an oversimplified view of human attitudes and emotions. According to Bradley, a person can only have one correct attitude toward an event, which is either positive, negative, or neutral, since her attitude has to correspond to the intrinsic value of that event, which presumably can only be positive, negative, or zero. Under this picture, if an event has a positive intrinsic value, it is fitting to have *a* pro-attitude toward it, regardless of what comparative value it has.

In some situations, however, it is not counterintuitive to imagine that one can have a mixed attitude (or two attitudes with different valences simultaneously) toward an intrinsically good event, insofar as one also recognizes the comparative disvalue of that event. For example, a person who longs for studying abroad can be ambivalent about it since he realizes that studying abroad prevents him from spending time with his family. He might also have two different attitudes toward studying abroad: he is looking forward to studying abroad, but at the same time he is also sad about the very same fact. If we accept Bradley's view, we would have to say that this person has unfitting attitudes toward his studying abroad. But these emotional responses seem entirely appropriate, even assuming that studying abroad is intrinsically good for him.²³ Thus, I conclude that Bradley's example is unconvincing because it relies on an incorrect view of human attitudes and emotions. Given that fitting ambivalent attitudes are possible, the most

²³ For detailed accounts of how ambivalent emotions can be fitting or appropriate, see Greenspan (1980), and Tappolet (2005).

plausible way to accommodate them is to allow our attitudes to respond, at least sometimes, to the comparative value of an event.

Turn now to the second example from Bradley:

Suppose you know your nemesis will murder you today. He is a skilled assassin who never fails. If he were not to kill you, you would have years of happiness to look forward to. (Bradley 2021, p. 164)

Suppose you, as the protagonist in the above scenario, are dismayed at the fact that you are about to undergo an event that is extremely comparatively bad because it prevents you from enjoying many intrinsically good things. You then do the following thing to reduce the badness of your inevitable death:

You decide to hire a backup assassin to kill you tomorrow. The backup won't be needed due to the certainty that your nemesis will succeed. But his presence changes what your death deprives you of. Instead of being deprived of years of happiness, you will be deprived of just one day. (Bradley 2021, p. 164)

Now, if attitudes do track the comparative value of an event, then presumably after hiring a backup assassin, you should be less upset about the fact that you will be murdered by your nemesis because the impending murder no longer deprives you of many years of a good life—if you *survived* the attack from your nemesis, you *would* soon be killed by the assassin you hire. But intuitively, whoever is confronting this situation should not change their attitude toward the impending murder. Thus, Bradley argues, our attitudes should not respond to comparative value.

In response, I agree with Bradley that it would be implausible if someone facing this situation did change her attitude after hiring a backup assassin. But I suspect the implausibility lies in the fact that hiring a backup assassin does *not* actually reduce the badness of the impending murder. It is disputable whether the badness of the impending murder is indeed reduced by hiring a backup assassin, for it is not clear whether the impending murder does deprive the protagonist of just one day after the hiring of a backup assassin.

To decide this issue, suppose I am the one who is going to be murdered by my nemesis and consider what would have happened if the event that I am murdered by my nemesis had not occurred. Here is one way to read the counterfactual situation: in the closest possible world in which I am not murdered by my nemesis, I will soon be killed by the backup assassin I hire. However, a different way to read the situation is to understand the closest possible world in which I am not murdered by my nemesis as the world in which my nemesis does not intend to kill me at all. Since it is stipulated that my nemesis is a skilled assassin who never fails, a more plausible explanation of why I am alive should be that he does not intend to kill me, rather than that he fails to do so. But if my nemesis did not intend to kill me in the first place, I would not hire a backup assassin. Thus, in the closest possible world in which I am not murdered by him, I will still have many years to look forward to. According to the second reading, the badness of the

impending murder is not reduced because it is not true that if I had not been murdered by my nemesis, I would have had just one day to live.²⁴

It seems that both readings of what would have happened had I not been murdered by my nemesis make sense. But Bradley must argue that the only correct reading of the situation is the first one; otherwise, he cannot establish that *the comparative badness of the murder is reduced but we should not change our attitude toward it*. One reason Bradley can appeal to is that the second reading of the counterfactual conditional involves backtracking: when considering what would have happened had I not been murdered by my nemesis, we do not hold fixed the events preceding the event of my nemesis's murdering me. That is, in the second reading, we change the event of my hiring a backup assassin, which is the event prior to my nemesis's murdering me, because we see the connection between these two events. If, however, we hold fixed the events prior to the event of my being murdered, then we will agree that had my nemesis failed to kill me, I would have soon been killed by the backup assassin hired by me.

For his argument to work, Bradley has to insist that the interpretation of counterfactual conditionals should not allow backtracking. This is a controversial issue, and I do not have the capacity to adjudicate it here.²⁵ For this reason, I suggest that we avoid this problem by considering a modified scenario where no obvious connection

²⁴ See Egerstrom (2021) and McMahan (2002, p. 130) for similar analyses of the counterfactual situations of this type.

²⁵ Some philosophers allow that backtracking counterfactual conditionals can be true. See, for example, Lewis (1979).

exists between the event of impending murder and the event that is supposed to reduce its badness:

Suppose you know your nemesis will murder you today. He is a skilled assassin who never fails. If he were not to kill you, you would have years of happiness to look forward to. While you are dismayed at the fact that you are about to undergo something that is extremely comparatively bad, you learn from a reliable source that some deadly virus just accidentally leaked from a secret laboratory and the scientists predict that human beings will soon get infected and die out within a week.

When I, as the protagonist in the above scenario, consider what would have happened had I not been murdered by my nemesis, the only plausible situation is that I will soon die of the virus infection. Since the event of the virus leak happens independently of the event of the impending murder, it makes no sense to say that had I not been murdered by my nemesis, the virus leak would not have happened either. So, in the modified scenario, the badness of the impending murder is indeed reduced by the presence of the virus leak, and, more importantly, it seems appropriate if I somehow feel less upset about the impending murder and thus change my attitude toward it. Given that our intuition in the modified scenario favors changing the attitude toward the impending murder, we have a positive reason to believe that our attitudes can fittingly respond to the comparative value of an event, which is contrary to what Bradley attempts to establish.

The third example is a bit more complicated. Bradley invites us to imagine a situation where a person, S, applies for a grant to attend summer camp, and consider how S should feel about the different outcomes.

Event A (max funding): S gets the maximum funding, leading to outcome A: S goes to the super-fun sports camp where she gets 50 units of sports pleasure.

Event B (good funding): S gets funded at a lesser rate, leading to outcome B: S goes to the pretty-fun music camp where she gets 40 units of music pleasure.

Event C (no funding): S gets no funding, leading to outcome C: S does not go to any camp, and gets no pleasure at all. (Bradley, 2021, p. 165)

In addition to describing the possible outcomes, Bradley adds the following stipulation: in the world in which S gets the maximum funding, it would be because a small number of people applied and S turns out to be one of the strongest applicants. In this situation, even if S had not received the maximum funding, S would still have got the lesser one. However, in the world in which S gets the lesser funding, it would be because a large number of people applied and the selection becomes very competitive. In this situation, had S not received the lesser funding, S would have got no funding at all.

By way of reminder, here is what Bradley and the deprivation theorists in general mean by “prevention”: an event, E_1 , *prevents* another event, E_2 , from happening if and only if E_1 occurs and E_2 does not occur *and* had E_1 not occurred, E_2 would have occurred. Given that an event’s comparative value is determined by what it prevents from happening, in the situation stipulated by Bradley, Event A has a comparative value of -40 since it prevents Event B from happening. Event B only prevents Event C from happening, so Event B’s comparative value is 0.

Now, if S considers both the comparative and intrinsic values when forming attitudes towards these outcomes, S would have a stronger pro-attitude toward Event B

than Event A since the overall value of Event A is 10 and the overall value of Event B is 40. But Bradley contends that “[s]uch attitudes cannot be fitting” because “S should have a stronger pro-attitude towards receiving the maximum funding than towards receiving moderate funding”, and his ground for making this claim is this:

In S’s deliberations about which outcome to choose...S may incorrectly choose the moderate funding on the grounds that it would be fitting for him to be happiest if he were to choose the moderate funding. (Bradley 2021, p. 166)

Bradley does not specify in what sense choosing the moderate funding is *incorrect*. But generally speaking, when we say that a certain action is incorrect, what we mean is that this action violates some normative standard. In the present context, it seems more plausible to understand the incorrectness in question as prudential incorrectness rather than moral incorrectness, since Bradley’s example is concerned with personal deliberations toward different outcomes. So understood, Bradley’s argument is that attitudes responding to comparative value cannot be fitting because when one acts in accordance with these attitudes, one’s action could be prudentially incorrect—that is, one’s action could fail to advance one’s well-being

Now that we have a better understanding of what Bradley tries to establish by the third example, we can see that it is unsuccessful. The reason is that Bradley is implicitly committed to an erroneous assumption—namely, an attitude can be fitting *only* if one’s acting upon this attitude contributes to one’s well-being. To see why this assumption is false, consider a situation where Walter dances awkwardly and his employee, Saul, happens to witness it. Suppose in this situation, amusement on the part of Saul is fitting

because the fact that Walter's posture is awkward makes it fitting for anyone who witnesses it to feel amused. But even if Saul feels amused, it may be prudentially wrong for him to act upon this fitting amusement by, say, laughing at Walter's dancing, since doing so would likely disrespect his own boss and lead to negative consequences (for example, Walter holds grudges against Saul and finds fault with him in the following days). Despite the imprudence of Saul's acting upon his amusement, the *fittingness* of the amusement does not seem to be affected at all, given that Walter indeed dances awkwardly. Hence, by this example, I submit that an attitude can be fitting even though acting upon it is prudentially incorrect—that is, counterproductive to one's well-being. Since the assumption on which Bradley relies has been shown to be false, his argument fails to convince us that attitudes in response to comparative value cannot be fitting.

In sum, I have shown that Bradley's examples fail to support that all of our attitudes would be inappropriate if they respond to the comparative value of an event. This result leaves open the possibility that some attitudes toward comparatively bad events can be fitting. So, that fear, as a kind of attitude, is an appropriate response to comparatively bad events like death has not been shown to be impossible by Bradley.

2.3 Comparative Value and Fear

Unlike Bradley, many philosophers believe that comparatively bad events merit negative attitudes.²⁶ What these philosophers contest is the claim that these events merit fear in particular. Timmerman belongs to this group of philosophers. While allowing that death

²⁶ See, for example, Draper (1999) and Timmerman (2016).

can merit some negative attitudes such as lament, Timmerman (2022) argues that fear cannot be a fitting response to merely comparatively bad events like death, since “fear does not track [comparative] badness at all” (p. 386). Let us consider Timmerman’s argument by first looking at a pair of scenarios:

Intrinsic badness with comparative goodness (IBCG). Suppose you’re facing a decade of constant torture, every second of which will be pure agony. It’s perfectly appropriate to fear this impending horrific torture even if what otherwise would have happened is that you would have been subjected to this kind of torture for 20 years.

Intrinsic badness with comparative badness (IBCB). [I]magine now that you’re once again facing a decade of constant torture, but what would have otherwise happened is that you would have only been tortured for 5 years. (Timmerman 2022, p. 385)

Given that fear is an appropriate response to the impending torture of 10 years, Timmerman (2022) observes that “the amount of fear that is warranted doesn’t seem to change at all with the amount of [comparative] badness at stake” (p. 385). That is, whether the impending torture is presented as having comparative goodness or having comparative badness, the amount of fear a person has toward it “should remain unchanged” (p. 385). Based on this phenomenon, Timmerman proposes the following argument:

- (1) It is rational to fear impending torture.
- (2) The amount of fear it’s rational to have toward the impending torture does not

depend on its [comparative] goodness or badness.

(3) If (2), then the amount of fear it's rational to have toward any event does not depend on *its [comparative] goodness or badness*.

(4) Therefore, the amount of fear it's rational to have toward any event does not depend on its [comparative] goodness or badness. (Timmerman 2022, p. 386, emphasis in original)

Timmerman thinks this argument is sound because premise (1) is self-evident, premise (2) is supported by a pair of examples (IBCG and IBCB), and the generalization from (2) to (3) seems justified.

Notice, however, that the pair of examples offered by Timmerman does not in fact support premise (2), which is the claim that the amount of fear it is rational to have toward the impending torture does not *depend on* its comparative goodness or badness. His examples only show that the amount of fear it is rational to have does not increase or decrease with the amount of comparative value. Thus, a more accurate formulation of what the comparison between IBCG and IBCB suggests should be:

(2*) The amount of fear it is rational to have toward the impending torture does not *covary with* its comparative goodness or badness.

Accordingly, the relevant conclusion Timmerman should draw is (4*): the amount of fear it is rational to have toward any event does not *covary with* its comparative goodness or badness. Now, given that (4*) is the legitimate conclusion of Timmerman's argument, he can establish that "fear does not track comparative badness at all" *only* if (4*) is incompatible with the following claim:

(5) The fact that a person has rational fear toward a certain event depends on the fact that the event in question is comparatively bad for that person.

(5) allows that there may be some dependence relation between fear and comparative badness that backs the explanation of why fear is a fitting response to death as something merely comparatively bad. So, Timmerman must refute (5). The only way for him to do so is to show that (4*), which is the claim he actually establishes, entails the falsity of (5). But unfortunately, (4*) is compatible with (5). This is because the non-covariation of two entities x and y does not entail that the fact involving x is not dependent upon the fact involving y.²⁷

Let me explain why the above entailment does not hold. Broadly speaking, there are various kinds of dependence relations (causation, constitution, grounding, and so on). Take grounding relation for example. A fact can be partially or fully grounded in other facts. When fact p is *partially* grounded in fact q, p is still said to be dependent upon q, in the sense that one of the reasons why p obtains is that q obtains. But the partial grounding relation between p and q does not guarantee any covariation between the constituents of p and q. Here is an example. The fact that subject S is feeling pain at t is (at least partially) grounded in the fact that S's C-fibers are stimulated at t. However, the amount of pain S feels does not necessarily covary with the amount of stimulation of her C-fibers. When the amount of stimulation increases, the amount of pain S feels could remain unchanged,

²⁷ I use the term "entity" broadly to include not only objects but also properties. And what I understand by a "fact" is an object's instantiating a property, so a fact, in the present context, is something that can be represented by a true proposition but not itself identical to it.

for there are other factors that can affect the amount of pain a person feels, for example, her level of consciousness, or her focus of attention. It is thus possible that the amount of pain S feels does not covary with the amount of stimulation of S's C-fibers, but the fact that S is feeling pain at t is dependent on, or more precisely, grounded in, the fact that S's C-fibers are stimulated at t.

By the above example, I submit that two facts *can* stand in some dependence relation without there being any covariation between the constituents of these facts. Hence, it is possible that no covariation exists between two entities x and y, but the fact involving x still depends in some way on the fact involving y. Apply this result to Timmerman's case: even though the amount of fear it is rational to have toward an event does not covary with the event's comparative value, it is still possible that the fact that a person has rational fear toward a certain event is dependent upon, or more precisely, grounded in, the fact that the event in question is comparatively bad for that person. For this reason, (4*) does not entail the falsity of (5). Since Timmerman cannot allow (5) to be true but the only claim he establishes, namely (4*), fails to falsify (5), his argument is unsuccessful. Rather than establishing that fear does not track comparative badness *at all*, Timmerman's argument at best shows that fear does not track comparative badness in the way of covarying with it. This conclusion leaves room for other ways in which fear can depend on comparative badness that are relevant to explaining why fear is a fitting response to death.

Finally, let us consider a slightly different approach. Perhaps we do not need arguments to recognize the implausibility of responding to comparative value. Some

concrete examples may suffice to reveal the absurdity of fearing something only comparatively bad. This is the strategy adopted by Draper. Rather than constructing arguments for the claim that fear should not be directed toward merely comparative value, Draper provides examples to show that our fear would be unusual and not reasonable if we attend solely to the comparative value of an event:

Suppose I am approached by a big, snarling dog. Then fear on my part might well be rational, but not if that fear is directed entirely at the possibility that a dog bite will cost me a lot of money in medical bills, with the ultimate consequence that I will not be able to afford a fine wine that I had hoped to enjoy. Or suppose that I learn that an unexpected financial loss will prevent me from taking a long-awaited and much-deserved vacation in Barcelona. Then disappointment might well be reasonable, but being frightened by such a misfortune would be unfitting. To sincerely say, “Not living it up in Barcelona scares the hell out of me,” would be an indication that I suffer from a rather unusual phobia. (Draper 2013a, p. 303)

By these two examples, Draper intends to show that the comparative badness of an event never merits fear, so death, as merely comparatively bad, does not merit fear.

In my view, Draper’s examples fail to establish that it is *always* unfitting for one to fear an event out of its comparative badness. Here is an example of fitting fear toward comparative badness:

Bamm-Bamm is suffering from a chronic disease. This disease does not cause Bamm-Bamm to experience any pains but instead seriously reduces his cognitive capacity, without the proper functioning of which he could not enjoy many good

things in life. There is a rare pill that can cure the disease. Bamm-Bamm's mother, Betty, happens to acquire this pill. Suffering from delusions, Betty mistakenly believes that Bamm-Bamm will leave her once he has recovered. She then decided to throw away the pill. Bamm-Bamm is thus terrified by Betty's decision.²⁸

I submit that Bamm-Bamm's fear is appropriate, even though it is directed toward an event that is purely comparatively bad. The badness of Betty's deciding to throw away the pill is only comparative: it is bad in virtue of preventing Bamm-Bamm from enjoying the goods that he would otherwise have had had he taken the pill.²⁹ But our intuition is that the comparative badness of Betty's decision merits fear on the part of Bamm-Bamm. So, contra Draper, it is not the case that comparative badness never merits fear.

The case of Bamm-Bamm is sufficient to show that comparatively bad events *can* merit fear and that premise (2) of the contemporary ETA is false. But to make my argument more persuasive, let me briefly explain why Draper's examples and mine can both be true—that is, why it is possible for comparative badness to merit fear in some cases but not in others. The correct explanation, I believe, is this: a fact that makes a certain attitude fitting in one situation may not *always* do so in every situation, for the background conditions in a situation can make a difference to whether a fact is a fit-

²⁸ This example is adapted from Johansson and Risberg (2022, p. 516).

²⁹ Here I assume that had Betty not decided to throw away the pill, she would have decided to let Bamm-Bamm take it.

making fact for a certain attitude.³⁰ To illustrate, consider an example where S grieves the death of his wife. Suppose what makes S's grief fitting is the fact that S lost his wife. But, let us assume, the reason why the fact that S lost his wife makes it fitting for S to grieve is that S still loves his wife. So, if the background condition changes—that is, if S does not love his wife anymore, then presumably, the fact that S lost his wife will no longer make it fitting for S to grieve. Here is another example. Suppose you resent your friend for skipping without any excuses the Zoom chat that she promised you. In this case, what makes your resentment fitting is the fact that your friend wronged you. But suppose that your friend has now apologized to you and you have accepted her apology. It is then natural to think that the fact that you were wronged by your friend no longer makes it fitting for you to resent her since the background conditions have changed—your friend has apologized and you have forgiven her.³¹

The above examples suggest that background conditions can affect whether a fact makes a certain attitude fitting. It is therefore not surprising that comparative badness sometimes merits fear but sometimes does not. This is because whether the fact that an event is comparatively bad for a person is a fit-making fact also depends on some other conditions which may differ from case to case. Thus, while Draper's examples and mine all share a common feature—the protagonists suffer comparatively bad events, there are

³⁰ The following discussion is inspired by Howard (2022), and the examples used are also from his article.

³¹ I mentioned the example of resentment and apology only for illustrative purposes. I am open to the possibility that the fittingness of resentment is not affected by the presence of an apology and the act of forgiving. For an argument for this view, see Howard (2022, p. 84).

many differences between our examples that can affect whether comparative badness merits fear. I will spell out the condition whose obtaining suffices for comparative badness to merit fear in Chapter Four. For the present purposes, I only need to establish the possibility that fear can fittingly respond to the comparative badness of an event, and the case of Bamm-Bamm, together with a brief explanation of how background conditions are relevant to fit-making facts, suffice to do it.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have rejected the two central arguments that deprivationists have used to support the claim that comparative value does not merit fear, which is premise (2) of the contemporary ETA. My criticism establishes the possibility that some comparative bad events merit fear and death may belong to those events. So, the contemporary ETA is unsuccessful because its premise (2) is not true.

CHAPTER THREE: LEADING ACCOUNTS OF HARM

In the first two chapters, I have shown that both the traditional and contemporary ETAs fail to establish that death does not merit fear. My next goal is to explain more positively why death can, at least sometimes, be a fitting object of fear. Given the intuitive assumption that an event merits fear *only if* it is bad, I cannot maintain that death merits fear on the part of the person who dies without also accepting that death is a bad thing for that person. But what explains the badness of death for the one who dies? The widely endorsed position is deprivationism about the badness of death, and I myself believe in it.

As I mentioned in Introduction, the notion that underlies deprivationism is the Counterfactual Comparative Account of harm (CCA), which, very roughly, states that an event *e* constitutes a harm for a person *S* if and only if *S* would have been better off *on balance* if *e* had not occurred. Since deprivationism appeals to CCA to explain why death is bad, the plausibility of deprivationism then depends to a large extent on the plausibility of CCA. But the truth of CCA is not obvious, given that there are many competing accounts of harm available in the literature. So, in order to justifiably maintain deprivationism, I am obliged to provide some defense for CCA. This is the task of the present chapter. I argue that CCA is the best account of harm in the literature because it is superior to its rival accounts: the Causal Account, the Temporal Comparative Account, and the Negative Influence on Well-Being Account.

3.1 Causal Account

To show that CCA is the best account of harm, I consider and reject each of its rival accounts that can be found in the literature on harm. Start with the Causal Account (CA):

What it is for an event *e* to harm an individual *S* is for *e* to cause *S* to be in an intrinsically bad state.³²

What state is intrinsically bad for people depends on which theory of well-being one endorses. For hedonism, only pleasures are intrinsically good for people and only pains are intrinsically bad for people. For desire satisfactionism, only desire fulfillments are intrinsically good for people and only desire frustrations are intrinsically bad for people. Of course, CA can be liberal on this issue since it can claim that whatever states turn out to be intrinsically bad for people, an event constitutes a harm for a person only by *causing* that person to be in that kind of state. (For similar reasons, all the accounts of harm I consider in this chapter do not have to commit themselves to any particular theory of well-being.)

CA successfully captures many phenomena that we ordinarily take to be instances of harm. Consider, for example, that Connor punches Dustin in the face. It is intuitive that Connor's punching Dustin in the face harms Dustin. And CA can explain why this is so: the event of Connor's throwing a punch at Dustin's face harms Dustin in virtue of causing Dustin to experience pain, which is intrinsically bad according to hedonism. Since many events in everyday life are like Connor's punching Dustin in the face, CA can deliver the intuitively correct verdict in many cases.

Despite having initial attraction, CA is extensionally inadequate. There are some cases that we intuitively think are *not* harmful, but CA analyzes them as harms. Imagine

³² This way of formulating the view is a revision of the formulation contained in Johansson and Risberg (2022, p. 510).

that a doctor performs surgery on a patient and the surgery inevitably involves many painful experiences. In this scenario, the doctor causes the patient to be in pain states. But it is counterintuitive to say that the doctor's performing surgery on the patient harms the patient. Our considered judgment seems to entail otherwise: the surgery benefits the patient. So, CA fails to conform to our intuition. Of course, CA theorists may have ways to respond to this kind of example. They can distinguish between *pro tanto* and *all-things-considered* harm and argue that the doctor's performing surgery constitutes *pro tanto* harm but *all-things considered* benefit. I will not pursue the debate here since I think CA is subject to other counterexamples.

The case of surgery suggests that CA over-generates harm. Now, I want to point to other cases where CA seems to under-generate harms. That is, these are cases that we intuitively regard as harmful, but CA fails to accommodate them. Here is one example: Jones knocks Smith unconscious with a baseball bat. Clearly, Smith suffers harm in this example. But given that the state of unconsciousness is not intrinsically bad (at least not according to hedonism), CA is forced to accept that Jones's action does not harm Smith, which is extremely counterintuitive.

CA theorists might respond by arguing that the states of unconsciousness can in some cases be intrinsically bad and that Smith's being unconscious is such a case. But whether this line of response is successful depends on whether CA theorists can provide a criterion for distinguishing unconscious states that are intrinsically bad from those that are not. And I will not pursue the question here.

Granting that the state of unconsciousness can sometimes be justifiably taken to be intrinsically bad for the person who is in it, CA is still subject to the problem of under-generation of harm. This is because not every instance of harm obtains in virtue of some causal relation. Consider the following example adapted from Johansson and Risberg (2022, p. 518):

C-fiber. Batman feels pain at *t* in virtue of the fact that his C-fibers are stimulated at *t*.

Intuitively, the event of Batman's C-fibers being stimulated harms Batman, but this harm obtains not in virtue of causal relation but in virtue of metaphysical grounding relation.

Consider another everyday example: Jim wants Jane to be his girlfriend, but Jane refuses. Although Jane does not wrong Jim, it is evident that Jane's refusal harms Jim by making it the case that Jim's desire is frustrated. But does it make sense to say that Jane's refusal *causes* Jim's desire to be frustrated? Plausibly not. It is more natural to say that Jane's refusal, together with Jim's desire that Jane is his girlfriend, *constitute* Jim's desire frustration. So, the "making it the case" relation here is not causal but constitution. And this shows that harm can also obtain in virtue of constitution relation.

Now, if harm can obtain in virtue of some dependence relation other than the causal, CA is bound to be inadequate. And I think this problem is insurmountable for CA. One cannot save CA simply by proposing a disjunctive account of harm that includes all the dependence relations:

What it is for an event *e* to harm an individual *S* is for *e* to cause *S* to be in an intrinsically bad state, *or* for *e* to ground the fact that *S* is in an intrinsically bad state, *or* for *e* to constitute the fact that *S* is in an intrinsically bad state.

An obvious reason why this move does not work is that the above account includes relations like constitution and grounding, so it should not be regarded as a *causal* account.

Moreover, a disjunctive account cannot do the job of specifying the *nature* or the *essence* of harm, or *what it is* for an event to constitute harm. This is because in spelling out what it is for an event to constitute harm, we want to identify the distinctive feature that *unifies* all the phenomena that we take to be harms. But a disjunctive account fails to give us such a unifying feature about the nature of harm. At best, what a disjunctive account tells us is that all the phenomena in question are referred to by the word “harm”.³³

3.2 Temporal Comparative Account

Consider, next, the Temporal Comparative Account (TCA):

An event *e* is a harm for a subject *S* if and only if *e* makes *S* worse off than *S* was before *e* occurred. (Foddy 2014, p. 156)

Like CA, TCA is able to accommodate many intuitive cases. In the example of Connor’s punching Dustin in the face, TCA entails that Connor’s action harms Dustin because

³³ See Schroeder (2007, Ch. 4) for a detailed discussion of why a disjunctive account cannot do the job of specifying the metaphysical nature of things.

Dustin is worse off than he was before Connor threw his punch. Besides, TCA seems to handle cases that trouble CA. In the case of Jane's refusing to be Jim's girlfriend, TCA yield the correct verdict that Jane's refusal harms Jim because Jim is worse off than he was before Jane refused to be his girlfriend—before Jane's refusal, Jim's particular desire was not frustrated.

However, the major problem with TCA is that it fails to capture what is typically referred to as “preventive harm”. The protagonist in the following scenario clearly suffers harm, even though his well-being level remains the same after the occurrence of the harmful event:

Hampered Recovery. At t Bamm-Bamm is recovering from a long period of illness. If nobody interferes, he will recover fully, and his well-being level after t will be much higher than it was before t . Unfortunately, Bamm-Bamm's mother Betty suffers from Munchausen by proxy, and does not want Bamm-Bamm to fully recover. She therefore gives him a drug at t , which causes some of his symptoms to become chronic. As a result, his well-being level after t is the same as it was before t . (Johansson and Risberg 2022, p. 516)

Since it is obvious that the action of Bamm-Bamm's mother harms Bamm-Bamm and TCA fails to classify it as harm, TCA is not a satisfactory account of harm.³⁴

³⁴ It should be noted that CA as I formulated also seems to subject to this counterexample.

3.3 Negative Influence on Well-Being Account

An adequate account of harm must be able to accommodate all the counterexamples to CA and TCA. And it must do it by proposing a non-disjunctive account. That is, it must tell us what it is for an event to constitute harm by identifying the *unifying* feature of the phenomena that we call “harm”.

The Negative Influence on Well-Being Account (NIWA), recently proposed by Johansson and Risberg (2022), aims to do this job:

An event *e* is a harm for a subject *S* if and only if *e* adversely affects *S*’s well-being.

Like CA and TCA, NIWA handles ordinary cases very well. For NIWA, the reason why Connor’s punching Dustin in the face harms Dustin is that Connor’s action adversely affects Dustin’s well-being. In addition, NIWA can also deal with the examples that prove tricky for CA and TCA. In cases like *C-fiber* and *Hampered Recovery*, NIWA theorists can simply state that the stimulation of Batman’s C-fibers harms Batman because it adversely affects Batman’s well-being and that the action of Bamm-Bamm’s mother harms Bamm-Bamm because it adversely affects Bamm-Bamm’s well-being.

Despite these virtues, I do not think NIWA is an adequate account of the *nature* of harm. NIWA does not seem to further our understanding of *what it is* for an event to constitute harm. Instead, NIWA only seems to point out a different way of *referring to* the phenomena that we call “harm”. This may be what Johansson and Risberg intend when they are spelling out NIWA account. They explicitly say that they “are inclined to think that NIWA provides a plausible analysis of the concept HARM, and one that also

reveals the nature of what the concept *HARM* stands for—that is, of harm” (Johansson and Risberg 2022, p. 511).

I do not question whether NIWA can be an adequate account of the concept of harm, for the use of the concept *HARM* is not the focus of the philosophical theorizing about harm.³⁵ But given that the philosophical theorizing about harm aims to uncover the *nature* of harm, I am interested in whether NIWA can be a *metaphysical* account of harm that sheds light on the nature of harm. Johansson and Risberg think it can. But I offer reasons to think otherwise.

Notice that a metaphysical account of *X* should be able to yield a definite answer to the question of whether something is *X*. Take the account of water as H_2O , which is widely regarded as a metaphysical account of the nature of water. This account provides a criterion to determine whether or not a sample of liquid is water—that is, whether its molecular structure is H_2O . The account of water as H_2O can in principle tell us whether a sample of liquid is really water. And this is what we expect a metaphysical account to do.

³⁵ There is reason to be skeptical about whether a conceptual analysis can be successful. Presumably, a conceptual analysis aims to uncover the necessary and sufficient condition of the application of a concept. As Wittgenstein famously notes, however, some concepts, like *GAME*, have “blurred edges” (Wittgenstein 1953, §71). The things that we call “game” are all similar to one another in some respects, but there is no single and uniform criterion that determines when the concept *GAME* apply to a certain phenomenon. So, very likely, there is no single and uniform criterion that determines how people use the concept *HARM*.

NIWA, however, does not provide guidance on the unclear cases of harm. Johansson and Risberg are aware of this problem, but surprisingly, they take the inability to settle the unclear cases of harm as a virtue of NIWA. They think “[s]ometimes it is unclear whether a case involves harm or not. A further virtue of NIWA, understood as a conceptual analysis, is that it makes sense of this unclarity” (Johansson and Risberg 2022, p. 522). They consider the following case that first appears in Bradley (2012, p. 397) and has since been generally taken to be an unclear case of harm:

No Golf Clubs. Batman contemplates giving a set of golf clubs to Robin, but eventually decides to keep them for himself. If he had not decided to keep them, he would have given the clubs to Robin, which would have made Robin better off. (Johansson and Risberg 2022, p. 522)

Johansson and Risberg (2022) think “the most reasonable response is to suspend judgment about whether Batman’s decision harms Robin...[and this result] is only to be expected if NIWA is a correct analysis of the concept HARM” (p. 522).

Of course, as a conceptual account, it may be a virtue of NIWA to have this unclarity. For if a person suspends judgment on whether Batman’s decision *harms* Robin, she would presumably also suspend judgment on whether Batman’s decision *negatively affects* Robin’s *well-being*. This phenomenon may suggest that the application condition of HARM and that of NEGATIVELY AFFECTING WELL-BEING are the same, which may support NIWA as a conceptual biconditional. However, if NIWA is also a metaphysical account, we would expect NIWA to tell us whether *No Golf Clubs* is a case of harm (just like the analysis of water as H₂O would tell us whether a sample of liquid is water given all the

relevant features of that liquid). Failing to yield a determinate answer to whether *No Golf Clubs* is a case of harm shows that NIWA fails to do what a typical metaphysical account should do and is, thus, not an adequate account of the nature of harm.

3.4 Counterfactual Comparative Account

Finally, let us turn to the Counterfactual Comparative Account (CCA), the one that I take to be the most plausible account available in the literature. The general idea behind CCA is that an event *e* constitutes a harm for an individual *S* if and only if *S* would have been better off *on balance* had *e* not occurred. Here is a more technical formulation of CCA that employs the language of possible worlds to cash out the general idea:

A possible event *e* is a harm for *S* if and only if *S* is worse off in the nearest relevant possible world in which *e* occurs, *W_e*, than she is in the possible world nearest *W_e* in which *e* does not occur.³⁶

CCA is a powerful account. It handles the problem cases that trouble CA and TCA.

According to CCA, the stimulation of Batman's C-fibers harms Batman because had the event of his C-fibers being stimulated not occurred, Batman would have been better off. In *Hampered Recovery*, CCA yields the intuitively correct verdict that Bamm-Bamm is harmed by his mother's decision to give him the drug. The reason is that had his mother not decided to do what she in fact did, Bamm-Bamm would have been better off.

Moreover, unlike NIWA, CCA is not just a conceptual analysis of harm. CCA reveals the metaphysical nature of harm. This can be seen by noting that CCA provides a

³⁶ See Klocksiem (2022, p. 429) for this formulation.

way to determine whether an unclear case of harm is really harm. In *No Golf Clubs*, CCA tells us that Batman's decision to keep the golf clubs for himself harms Robin because if Batman had decided otherwise, Robin would have been better off—he would have got a set of new golf clubs.

Like other accounts of harm, CCA is not without criticisms. But I believe CCA can overcome them. Let us start with the under-generation problem. Philosophers have noted that CCA does not seem to capture all the phenomena that we regard as involving harm. Consider the following scenario from Nathan Hanna (2016):

Dark Knight. Bobby Knight gets mad at a philosopher, Phil, in response to a perceived slight. So he chokes Phil. Luckily for Phil, Knight is in anger management. It's taught him to better control his behavior. He choked Phil because he applied anger management techniques. If he hadn't, he would have dismembered Phil. (p. 263)

Intuitively, Knight's choking Phil harms Phil. But CCA seems unable to get this result right. According to CCA, Phil would not have been better off had Knight's choking not occurred, for Knight would have dismembered Phil if he had not choked Phil.

Neil Feit (2015) has provided a way to respond to the above under-generation problem. According to Feit, we can still justifiably say that Knight's action harms Phil since it belongs to a set of events such that if all of its member events had not occurred, Phil would have been better off. In *Dark Knight*, this set includes two events: Knight's choking Phil, and Knight's tearing off Phil's arms. CCA can be thus modified:

An event e constitutes harm for an individual S if and only if e belongs to a set of events such that if all of its member events had not occurred, S would have been better off.

This modified version of CCA can accommodate our ordinary examples as well. In *Hampered Recovery*, the set in question contains just one member: the event of Bamm-Bamm's mother's decision to give Bamm-Bamm the drug. So, we can plausibly say that Bamm-Bamm's mother's decision harms Bamm-Bamm in virtue of belonging to a set of events such that if all of its member events had not occurred, Bamm-Bamm would have been better off. Feit's modified version of CCA is thus able to solve the problem of under-generation of harm.

On the other hand, some philosophers have argued that CCA over-generates harm. Specifically, they think that CCA mistakenly takes some non-harmful events to be harmful. Consider again *No Golf Clubs*:

Batman contemplates giving a set of golf clubs to Robin, but eventually decides to keep them for himself. If he had not decided to keep them, he would have given the clubs to Robin, which would have made Robin better off. (Johansson and Risberg 2022, p. 522)

This case was previously treated as an unclear case of harm. And I mentioned that one merit of CCA is that it enables us to see that *No Golf Clubs* really involves harm.

However, many philosophers have strong intuitions that Batman's keeping the golf clubs for himself does *not* harm Robin. So, they argue that *No Golf Clubs* is a counterexample to CCA because CCA misclassifies it as involving harm.

The over-generation objection to CCA is based on the intuition that *No Golf Clubs* does not involve harm—specifically, the intuition that Batman’s keeping the golf clubs for himself does not harm Robin. To respond to this objection, it is instructive to consider the idea that drives this intuition. Hanna (2016) observes that this intuition may be rooted in the thought that “harm is especially important, such that we have strong, perhaps overriding reasons to prevent harm and to avoid harming” (p. 258). In general, *overriding* reasons are the reasons whose presence would outweigh all other countervailing reasons in determining what one should do. Since in *No Golf Clubs*, that Robin would have been better off had Batman done otherwise does not seem to be an overriding reason to prevent Batman from keeping the golf clubs for himself, people may find it intuitive to say that Batman’s action does not harm Robin. Hanna refers to the underlying thought as the “strong view” about the normative significance of harm, which can be formulated as follows:

If an event *e* is a harm for an individual *S*, then this fact provides an overriding reason to prevent or avoid *e*.

If the strong view is true, then *ipso facto* Batman’s action constitutes no harm given that there is no overriding reason to prevent Batman’s action. However, many philosophers (Hanna 2016, Feit 2015) find the strong view unintuitive. For example, Feit (2015) thinks that “there can be blameless harm, and also that any injunction against harming others must be merely *prima facie*” (385). It would take me too far afield to examine where exactly goes wrong with the strong view. But for the present purposes, it suffices to see that the strong view is highly controversial. So, without further arguments

for the strong view, *No Golf Clubs* does not establish that CCA is subject to the problem of over-generation of harm.

Now, I have shown that CCA is the best account of harm because it accommodates the counterexamples that plague other accounts and has the ability to handle the alleged problem that it itself faces.

CHAPTER FOUR: DEATH AS A FITTING OBJECT OF FEAR

In the last chapter, I showed that the Counterfactual Comparative Account (CCA) is the best account of harm available in the literature. Since deprivationism is the application of CCA to the explanation of the harm of death, we have reason to believe that deprivationism is a plausible position. But regarding the issue of whether death is a fitting object of fear, many prominent deprivationists argue that death as merely comparatively bad does not merit fear. In Chapter Two, I have rejected their arguments. So, the remaining task is to say more positively about why death can be a fitting object of fear given deprivationism. As a first step toward this goal, I revisit Draper's argument and present further counterexamples to his view that mere comparative badness does not merit fear. I anticipate that Draper may respond by challenging those who disagree with him to explain why some comparatively bad events merit fear while others do not. Drawing on my criticism of Draper, I meet this challenge by spelling out in virtue of what a merely comparatively bad event merits fear. According to the account I specify, death can, at least sometimes, merit fear on the part of the person who dies.

4.1 Draper's Argument

As a deprivationist about the badness of death, Draper argues that death, as merely comparatively bad, is not worthy of fear on the grounds that comparatively bad events cannot merit fear. Draper provides a couple of examples to show that comparative badness does not merit fear:

Suppose I am approached by a big, snarling dog. Then fear on my part might well be rational, but not if that fear is directed entirely at the possibility that a dog bite will

cost me a lot of money in medical bills, with the ultimate consequence that I will not be able to afford a fine wine that I had hoped to enjoy. Or suppose that I learn that an unexpected financial loss will prevent me from taking a long-awaited and much-deserved vacation in Barcelona. Then disappointment might well be reasonable, but being frightened by such a misfortunate would be unfitting. To sincerely say, “Not living it up in Barcelona scares the hell out of me,” would be an indication that I suffer from a rather unusual phobia. (Draper 2013a, p. 303)

By these examples, Draper aims to show that mere comparative badness does not merit fear, so death, as merely comparatively bad, does not merit fear either.

In my view, Draper’s argument is unsuccessful. His examples only show that *some* cases of comparatively bad events do not merit fear. But it does not follow from this that *all* cases of comparatively bad events do not merit fear. In Chapter Two, I argued that the following example is sufficient to reject Draper’s argument:

Bamm-Bamm is suffering from a chronic disease. This disease does not cause Bamm-Bamm to experience any pains but instead seriously reduces his cognitive capacity, without the proper functioning of which he could not enjoy many good things in life. There is a rare pill that can cure the disease. Bamm-Bamm’s mother, Betty, happens to acquire this pill. Suffering from delusions, Betty mistakenly believes that Bamm-Bamm will leave her once he has recovered. She then decided to throw away the pill. Bamm-Bamm is thus terrified by Betty’s decision.

In the example, if Betty had not decided to throw away the pill, she would presumably have given the pill to Bamm-Bamm and allowed him to recover. It thus follows that the event of Betty's deciding to throw away the pill is comparatively bad for Bamm-Bamm in the sense that had Betty not decided as she did, Bamm-Bamm would have been much better off. It should also be noted that the disease does not involve any intrinsic badness, like pains, so Bamm-Bamm's fear is directed toward the *mere* prevention of future goods. But intuitively, we still find Bamm-Bamm's fear fitting. That is, Betty's deciding to throw away the pill does merit fear on the part of Bamm-Bamm in virtue of preventing him from recovering from the disease and enjoying more intrinsic goods that he would otherwise have had.

Bamm-Bamm's case is not the only example of fitting fear toward merely comparative badness. We can modify Draper's original examples and turn them into cases of fitting fear:

Brown has made up his mind to become a sommelier and has signed up for a training course. The instructor of the training course recommends participants taste a certain expensive fine wine to cultivate their senses. On his way back home, Brown comes across a big snarling dog and is afraid that a dog bite will cost him a lot of money in medical bill and thereby make him unable to afford the wine.

Sally has been practicing dance moves and aspires to be a professional dancer someday. But Sally is now troubled by the fact her recent financial investment will be a failure. She fears that the financial loss will prevent her from affording a flight ticket to Barcelona, where she is scheduled to give an audition.

In the modified scenarios, it is intuitive to think that tasting the fine wine is good for Brown and flying to Barcelona (to give an audition) is good for Sally. So, both Brown and Sally would have been better off had the dog bite and the financial loss not occurred, respectively. In this sense, the dog bite is comparatively bad for Brown, and the financial loss is comparatively bad for Sally. But despite being directed toward comparative badness, both Brown's and Sally's fears seem intuitively justified.

Here, one might worry that in the cases of Brown and Sally, the badness of the dog bite and the financial loss is *intrinsic*, rather than merely comparative. This concern might seem especially pressing for those who endorse desire satisfactionism about well-being. Very roughly, desire satisfactionism is the view that what is intrinsically good for a person is the satisfaction of her desires, and what is intrinsically bad for a person is the frustration of her desires.³⁷ In the modified examples, it is intuitive to attribute to Brown the desire to taste the fine wine and to Sally the desire to fly to Barcelona to give an audition. If so, then it would seem that the dog bite and the financial loss frustrate Brown's and Sally's desires, respectively, and so the bad things that Brown and Sally suffer are *intrinsically* bad according to desire satisfactionism. But to refute Draper's view that comparative badness cannot merit fear, I need examples of comparative badness rather than intrinsic badness. Thus, desire satisfactionists about well-being might doubt whether my modified examples can be used as counterexamples to Draper's view.

³⁷ The formulation I mentioned here is an unqualified version of desire satisfactionism. A more sophisticated version would be that only the satisfaction of ideally informed desires is good for the person whose desires they are.

In response, I think even if one is a desire satisfactionist about well-being, one is not forced to view my modified examples as instances of desire frustration, which are presumed to be intrinsically bad. To see why this is so, note that human desires are, in many cases, conditional. That is, whether a person *wants* something is usually contingent upon the obtaining of relevant states of affairs. For example, I may want to watch the MLB postseason games *only if* the New York Yankees enter the playoffs. So, my wanting to watch the postseason games is a conditional desire—it is conditional on the New York Yankees’ entering the playoffs. Suppose the New York Yankees fail to secure a playoff spot. My desire to watch postseason games is not frustrated, but rather canceled—I no longer desire to watch postseason games. If one or more of the conditions on which my desire depends fail to obtain, then I do not have the desire in question and thus have nothing to be frustrated.³⁸

Return to my modified scenarios. In the case of Brown, it is *possible* that Brown’s desire to taste the fine wine is a conditional desire and one of its conditions is that Brown has some spare money. If so, then when the dog bite costs Brown a lot of money in medical bill, one of the conditions on which Brown’s desire depends fails to obtain—it is no longer true that Brown has some spare money. In this case, Brown’s desire is canceled, rather than frustrated, by the dog bite, and according to desire satisfactionism, the dog bite is *not* intrinsically bad for Brown because it involves no frustration of desires. But even if it involves no intrinsic badness, the dog bite may still be said to be comparatively bad for Brown, in the sense that if the dog bite had not occurred, Brown

³⁸ For a detailed discussion of conditional desires, see McDaniel and Bradley (2008).

would have the desire to taste the fine wine and this desire would have been satisfied, which would have been intrinsically good for him. Similar remarks are applicable to Sally's wanting to fly to Barcelona. In any case, it should be clear that even for someone who endorses desire satisfactionism, the cases of Brown and Sally are *not necessarily* cases of intrinsic badness.

Now, we have three examples of fitting fear toward comparative badness. But these examples are not sufficient to undermine Draper's argument. For Draper can agree that there exist cases of comparative badness that merits fear but still insist that deaths can never be such cases. In the next section, I address this possible response by explaining why a comparatively bad event can merit fear and more importantly, why a person's death can, at least sometimes, be such an event.

4.2 Why Death Merits Fear

My guiding question is this: what is it that makes the fears on the part of Bamm-Bamm, Brown, and Sally fitting toward comparative badness? Consider Bamm-Bamm first. He is terrified by Betty's decision to throw away the pill, in virtue of the fact that had Betty not decided to throw away the pill, he would have recovered from the disease that seriously reduces his cognitive capacity and gone on to enjoy more intrinsic goods in life. So, it appears that what makes a comparatively bad event merit fear is that it involves the loss of some important capacity. Indeed, this idea can be supported by Martha Nussbaum's account of what makes a life worthy of dignity. According to Nussbaum (2011, pp. 33–34), to live a life worthy of dignity, a person must possess to some threshold level ten Central Capabilities, which include what we ordinarily take to be the cognitive capacity

(that is, the ability to think and reason). So, one might hold that a comparatively bad event merits fear because it involves the loss of one or more Central Capabilities, which would prevent one from living a life worthy of dignity.

Appealing to Nussbaum's Central Capabilities, however, cannot explain why Brown's and Sally's worries are fitting. For the comparatively bad events that Brown and Sally suffer do not involve the loss of any Central Capabilities on their part. Thus, Nussbaum's idea fails to yield a complete explanation of what makes a comparatively bad event merit fear.

A more promising approach, in my view, is to focus on the welfare goods themselves, rather than the capabilities to enjoy those goods, and seek to explain why some comparatively bad events merit fear by appeal to the specific kind of welfare goods they involve. This is the approach that I pursue.

To identify the kind of welfare goods whose absence merits fear, let us compare Draper's original scenarios with my modified versions. On the face of it, it seems that the welfare goods involved in all these cases are the same: tasting some fine wine and having a trip to Barcelona. For Draper, these goods are mere enjoyments for the subjects. And his intuition is that without the presence of any intrinsic evils, one should not fear the prospect of being denied such goods because not having more enjoyments does not seem to merit fear. In my modified examples, however, the event of tasting the fine wine and the event of having a trip to Barcelona are more than just enjoyments to Brown and Sally, respectively. These events, had they obtained, would also have contributed to Brown's and Sally's projects of being a sommelier and being a professional dancer.

Pre-theoretically, we can all recognize, among the well-being-enhancing activities, which are projects and which are mere enjoyments. It seems intuitive that *being a novelist* is a project, and *eating a lollypop* is a mere enjoyment.³⁹ Since *being a sommelier* and *being a professional dancer* are more like *being a novelist*, both should be classified as projects. But *why* are these three activities projects? To answer this question, we need to specify the criterion for projects that underlies our intuitive judgments.

Here, I describe a project as an “activity”. By this, I mean that a project is not just a single event but a series of events. These project-related events can be narratively unified by a certain theme, e.g., “being a novelist”, and the obtaining of them contributes to the realization of the project in question. In the case of Brown, the event of tasting the fine wine contributes to Brown’s project by helping cultivate his senses. In the case of Sally, the event of traveling to Barcelona to give an audition contributes to Sally’s project since giving an audition is a constituent part of being a professional dancer. In both cases, we can distinguish between the projects and the events that contribute to them.

Unlike “being a sommelier” and “being a professional dancer”, some projects culminate in specific goals. For example, the project of summing Mt Everest culminates in getting oneself on the top of Mt Everest. So, one might think that summing Mt Everest *just is* the event of one’s getting on the top of Mt Everest. But this is not true. One’s getting on the top of Mt Everest is not equivalent to one’s summing Mt Everest. If it were, then one’s project of summing Mt Everest could be completed simply by one’s being carried to the top of Mt Everest by a helicopter while asleep. But this is

³⁹ I borrow this example from Dorsey (2012, p. 38).

absurd. A project counts as a project only if it is produced in the right way by the relevant events.⁴⁰ So, the event of one's getting on the top of Mt Everest is only a constituent part of the project of summitting Mt Everest. To count as realizing the project of summitting Mt Everest, one must engage in other events that bring about the fact that she gets on the top of Mt Everest, e.g., receiving cardio training, studying the trails. Since project-related events are something without which a project could not exist, to better understand projects, we should turn our attention to what counts as a project-related event.

As I mentioned above, project-related events are the events that can be narratively unified by a certain theme. But narrative unification is cheap. If a person spends all his life eating lollipops, then all the lollipop-eating events may be unified by the title "being a devoted lollipop eater." But intuitively this unifiability does not make the person's lollipop-eating events any more project-like. So, the criterion for a project-related event must include more than being narratively unifiable.

In my view, whether an event counts as a project-related event has to do with the reasons *for which* one engages in it, or the reasons that *motivate* one to engage in it.⁴¹ An event E counts as a project-related event of mine just in case (1) E can be narratively unified with some other events in my life, and more importantly, (2) the reasons for

⁴⁰ It is not easy to spell out what the *right* way is. But for my purpose, we can rely on our intuitive judgment. It is obvious that being carried to the top of Mt Everest is not the right way to fulfill the project of summitting Mt Everest. See Bradford and Keller (2016, p. 274) for more discussion.

⁴¹ Here I am talking about the reasons for which one acts, which are usually referred to as the "motivating" reasons. See Alvarez and Way (2024) for more discussion on different kinds of reasons.

which I engage in E include the fact that I have decided, made up my mind, or made a commitment, to undertake something whose realization requires E.⁴² I believe this criterion captures the events that we ordinarily take to be project-related. We think that for someone who embarks on a project of summiting Mt Everest, her receiving cardio training and planning the trails are project-related events. And the reason why these events are project-related is that they are motivated by the person's decision to summit Mt Everest.⁴³ (Of course, these events must be able to be narratively unified and contribute to the fact that the person gets on the top of Mt Everest.)

The criterion I provided *can* allow lollipop-eating events to be elevated to project-related events. This is because if the reasons for which a person eat lollipops also include the fact that he has committed himself to doing so, then a particular lollipop-eating event so motivated would count as contributing to the project of *being a devoted lollipop eater*. Of course, in most cases, a person eats lollipops *only* because he craves for something sweet or he just wants lollipops, and there is no relevant commitment involved in the motivation behind his eating. So, this explains why we think typical lollipop-eating events would not be project-related but mere enjoyments for the eater.

⁴² I understand deciding, making up one's mind, or committing oneself to, as mental actions of forming an intention. The intentions formed by these different actions may differ with respect to their robustness. If one simply decides to X, then one might easily give up X-ing when confronting some minor difficulties. But if one is committed to X-ing, then one might continue to X in the face of strong adversity.

⁴³ Of course, it is possible for a person who takes on a certain project to be motivated by things other than her decision to take on this project. What I require is that her motivational factors at least involve such a decision.

I have explained what counts as a project and how it differs from mere enjoyments. Philosophers who agree with me that there is a distinction between projects and enjoyments may offer different accounts of projects. It is not my intention to enumerate all the existing accounts and consider each of them in detail. Instead, what I want to do is to call attention to a widely shared idea among these philosophers, which is directly relevant to my purpose of spelling out why death can merit fear. The widely shared idea is this: it is crucial to have projects in order to live a good or meaningful life. Consider the following passage from Bernard Williams (1981):

...my present projects are the condition of my existence, in the sense that unless I am propelled forward by the conatus of desire, project and interest, it is unclear why I should go on at all...A man may have, for a lot of his life or even just for some part of it, a *ground* project or set of projects which are closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to his life. (p. 12, emphasis in original)

Of course, one might think Williams overstates the effects that projects, or ground projects, have on one's life. But the intuitive idea that having projects is of paramount importance to one's life is echoed by many contemporary philosophers. For example, Dale Dorsey (2012) argues that projects, especially long-term projects, are "the primary element of human welfare, the success or failure of which is the most important determinant of the prudential quality of a life" (p. 39).

Now, given the important place that projects occupy in one's well-being, I propose the following account to explain why comparatively bad events can merit fear:

Comparative badness that merits fear (CBMF): A comparatively bad event E merits fear on the part of person S if and only if the occurrence of E prevents the occurrence of one or more events that would have contributed to S's project(s).

In Draper's original examples, it is not clear that the events of tasting a fine wine and having a trip to Barcelona have anything to do with the projects of the subjects. So, taken at face value, the prevention of those events intuitively does not merit fear. In my modified examples, the events of tasting a fine wine and having a trip to Barcelona are project-related, and their obtaining would contribute to the realization of the projects of Brown and Sally. So, it is fitting for Brown and Sally to fear the prospect of the non-occurrence of those events.

CBMF also captures why the event of Betty's deciding to throw away the pill merits fear on the part of Bamm-Bamm. This is because it prevents the event of Bamm-Bamm's recovering from the disease that seriously reduces his cognitive capacity. And it is plausible to think that Bamm-Bamm's recovery from the disease is essential for achieving any projects he might have, for the realization of any project minimally requires the exercise of cognitive capacity.

To see why CBFM can accommodate the fittingness of fear toward death, let us modify the example of Sally. Suppose this time she does not have any financial loss but instead dies before she can fly to Barcelona to give an audition. Intuitively, Sally's premature death, if it is comparatively bad for her, merits fear on the part of Sally because it prevents her from giving an audition in Barcelona, which would have contributed to her project. If this modified scenario makes sense, then my account entails

that a person's death can be a fitting object of fear in virtue of preventing the event whose occurrence would have contributed to the project of that person.

Notice that CBMF does *not* entail that if a person's death is comparatively bad and prevents some events whose occurrence would have contributed to her project, then the person is *required* to fear her death. This is because fittingness does not always make demands (Fritz 2023). Consider, for example, that I see a lovely cat in a shelter. In virtue of having some feature that merits love on the part of the person who sees it, the cat is a fitting target of love. Now suppose that I am a cat person and psychologically capable of loving cats. It is not the case that I am obligated to love the cat.⁴⁴ What is true of my situation is that if I do respond to the cat with love, then my response is *justified*.⁴⁵ The fact that it is fitting to love the cat makes it the case that I may love the cat, but not that I ought to love the cat. By this example, it should be clear that fittingness-related facts do not always generate requirements. So, here I adopt the relatively uncontroversial assumption that fittingness-related facts at least justify responses. Thus, CBMF should be taken to imply that if a person fears her death, then her fear is justified to the extent that her death is comparatively bad for her and prevents some events whose occurrence would have contributed to her projects.

⁴⁴ I borrow this example from Berker (2022, p. 37).

⁴⁵ See Whiting (2021) for the distinction between justifying and demanding roles of reasons.

4.3 In Defense of My Account

This section considers and responds to three possible objections to CBMF. The first two can be successfully met, while the third one involves some larger issues that cannot be fully addressed in this dissertation. So, by considering the third possible objection, I aim to make explicit my assumption and point out the direction for future research.

First, one may grant that CBMF is a plausible account but question whether it can be straightforwardly applied to death. A critic might hold that death is a special sort of harm because a person no longer exists after she dies. But CBMF is an account that built from the comparatively bad events that occur within life: Bamm-Bamm, Brown, and Sally are still alive after suffering the comparatively bad things. So, it may be argued that CBMF cannot be used to explain the fittingness of fear toward death because death is not an ordinary comparative harm that occurs during a person's lifetime.

In response, I think this objection presupposes the following constraint on what counts as an object of fear: one can fear an event *only if* one can co-exist with that event. If this constraint on the object of fear is true, then death would be ruled out from the possible objects of fear (because no person can co-exist with her death) and CBMF would be inapplicable to death. But I do not find this constraint plausible. It should be noted that fear is *often* a forward-looking attitude—that is, when a person fears some event, that event has not yet occurred.⁴⁶ So, in many cases, for a person S to fear some event E, there needs not be any overlap between the existence of S and E. Of course, if the attitude in question is not a forward-looking one like fear, then the co-existence requirement may

⁴⁶ I do not deny that it is possible for someone to fear something that happened in the past.

seem plausible. Consider, for example, a person who takes pride in owning a fancy car. It does not make sense to say that the person can take pride in owning a fancy car, but that car can never co-exist with her. But since fear in general does not require the co-existence between the one who fears and the object of fear, the first possible objection, which presupposes this co-existence constraint, is not plausible.

Second, one might point out that frustration seems to be fitting toward the prevention of projects, and so challenge CBMF by arguing that frustration, rather than fear, should be *the* fitting attitude in question. This reasoning may be adopted by Draper since at one place he mentioned that “frustration may be a rational response to learning that death will prevent one from completing some valuable long-term project, especially if one has invested tremendous time and effort toward its completion” (Draper 2013b, 78–79).

In response, it should be noted that this second possible objection implicitly assumes that an event *cannot* have more than one fitting attitudes simultaneously. But this assumption is false. That a comparatively bad death merits frustration does not automatically rule out that the same death merits fear, or vice versa. An event can merit different responses in virtue of the different features it has. Consider, for example, a person who has volunteered to work in an orphanage. Presumably, it is fitting for this person to take pride in what she has done since devotion to charity work is prideworthy. But what the person has done in this case may also make joy on her part fitting if spending time with children is enjoyable for her. By the same logic, a comparatively bad event may merit frustration in virtue of preventing some project that “one has invested

tremendous time and effort toward its completion,” but it is possible that the same event merits fear simply because it prevents one from completing her project. Hence, one cannot reject CBMF merely by appeal to the fact that frustration can be a fitting response toward a comparatively bad event that prevents one from completing her *long-term* project.

Third, one may question the assumption that projects are “the primary element of human welfare” that CBMF appeals to. Many philosophers (e.g., Calhoun 2009, Larmore 1999) think that it is *not* necessary to have life-projects in order to live a good life. So, CBMF, by appealing to the assumption, implicitly rules out many theories about human welfare.

In response, I acknowledge that CBMF is limited in the sense that it is not compatible with every theory of welfare. But this limitation will not affect my purpose, which is to convince someone who accepts deprivationism that death can be a fitting object of fear. This is because deprivationism is *not* committed to any particular theory of welfare. So, even if CBMF rules out certain theories of welfare, it will not beg the question against deprivationism and thereby lose its force.

Of course, the view that projects constitute the primary element of human welfare, despite being intuitively compelling, requires further defense. But a detailed engagement with this issue would be beyond the scope of this dissertation. So, my conclusion here is a qualified one: as long as deprivationists grant that projects are crucial to human welfare, they should be able to see why death can be a fitting object of fear in virtue of preventing people from realizing their projects.

4.4 Conclusion

Many contemporary deprivationists believe their theory entails that death is *not* a fitting object of fear. But this is not true. In this chapter, I have provided an account of why death can be a fitting object of fear. In my view, a person's death merits self-interested fear just in case her death is comparatively bad for her and prevents some events whose occurrence would have contributed to her projects.

CONCLUSION

An Epicurean therapeutic argument (ETA) is an argument that aims to show that death is not a fitting object of fear. There are two kinds of ETAs: the traditional ETA and the contemporary ETA. The traditional ETA, which was first proposed by Epicurus, relies on the Epicurean view that death is not bad for the one who dies. Coupled with the intuitive assumption that an event merits fear *only if* it is bad, the Epicurean view about the badness of death entails that death does not merit fear on the part of the person who dies. The contemporary ETA differs from the traditional ETA on whether death is bad for the one who dies. Many contemporary philosophers endorse deprivationism about the badness of death. They think that death can (but only) be comparatively bad for the person who dies. Nevertheless, many deprivationists argue that comparative badness does not merit fear, so death, despite being comparatively bad for the person who dies, still does not merit fear on the part of the person who dies.

In the first part of my dissertation, I systematically examined these two kinds of ETAs and showed that none of them is successful at establishing that death does not merit fear. In the second part of my dissertation, I provided a positive account of why death can be a fitting object of fear. Drawing on the deprivationist view that death is comparatively bad for the one who dies, I argue that death merits self-interested fear on the part of the person who dies if and only if it is comparatively bad for her and prevents some events whose occurrence would have contributed to her projects.

It should be noted that I do not pretend to have addressed all the important issues about the fear of death. Many philosophers have argued that the fear of death is a distinct

kind of emotion that is not directed toward comparative badness, but rather, as Samuel Scheffler (2013) puts it, toward the fact that “I myself—the thinker of my thoughts, the perceiver of what I perceive—will simply stop being” (pp. 85–86). My dissertation did not touch on this kind of fear since it is not directly associated with the well-being of an individual. But undeniably, this is another interesting problem about the fear of death and worth exploring in the future.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ For an excellent discussion of this kind of fear of death, see Behrendt (2019).

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