

BOOK REVIEW

Saving People From the Harm of Death. EDITED BY ESPEN GAMLUND & CARL TOLLEF SOLBERG (Oxford: OUP, 2019. Pp. xviii+284.)

Saving People From the Harm of Death is a collection of nineteen new essays on issues at the intersection of the philosophy of death and health policy. It addresses a number of philosophical as well as practical challenges that arise when considering how scarce medical resources ought to be distributed in cases where individuals' existence is at stake. The contributors range from people who are not primarily philosophers to people who are very well known for their philosophical work. The result is a multifaceted and overall stimulating volume that offers many insights into, e.g. the value of death, population ethics, and personal identity. It consists of four main parts: 'Policy', 'Theory', 'Population Ethics', and 'Critical Perspectives'. In this review, part two will be in focus.

A large part of the book, and especially part two, is concerned with the issue of how to account for the alleged intuition that it is typically worse to die as a young adult than to die as an infant (or as a fetus). This intuition is a significant ingredient in the debate, because it does not sit well with *Deprivationism*, i.e., the standard account of death's badness. According to Deprivationism, death is bad for its victim insofar as her life would have been intrinsically better for her if her death had not occurred. Thus, assuming that more life means more intrinsic goods, Deprivationism implies, contrary to the intuition, that it is worse to die as an infant than as a young adult. Further, insofar as the badness of death should guide us morally in deciding whom to save from death, Deprivationism's result recommends saving the infant rather than the young adult.

Jeff McMahan, whose contribution to this volume consists of no less than two chapters (8 and 19) and a foreword, has previously proposed a "Time-Relative Interest Account" (TRIA) to get around the problems that Deprivationism faces. In this influential account, the badness of death is determined not only by the loss of goods, but also by the strength of the psychological relations that would have developed for the victim between the time of her death and at the times when she would have enjoyed the goods of which she is deprived.

Because an infant, in contrast to a young adult, is only weakly psychologically connected to her future self, the badness of the death of an infant is substantially discounted.

TRIA has been the subject of several criticisms. In this book, more objections are raised, especially by John Broome (ch. 7), Ben Bradley (ch. 9), and Hilary Greaves (ch. 13). Broome's chapter presents, among other things, an updated version of his earlier critique. As before, the objection is that TRIA sometimes gives rise to incoherence. More precisely, it leads to a 'cycle of betterness' with respect to possible lives in which goods and evils are distributed over time in a particular way. Because such a cycle is unacceptable, we ought to reject the view. It is not clear, however, that Broome's remarks really hit the target. After all, TRIA is silent on the goodness or betterness of *lives*—it is concerned only with the event of death. As McMahan himself writes in response to Broome's charge, 'claims about interests at times are not even implicitly claims about the goodness of lives' (p. 121).

Similarly, Greaves worries what no version of TRIA will fit with a plausible betterness ordering on whole worlds, which, in her view, is what should ultimately guide our moral decisions. Partly for this reason, she concludes that, contrary to McMahan's ambitions, TRIA should not be seen as a view of death's badness 'in the axiological sense', but rather as a view of death's badness "in the emotional-reaction sense" (p. 195). I am not sure, though, that this is a fair picture of TRIA. While there is certainly reason to be sceptical about TRIA's ability to help us make ethically correct choices, this need not make TRIA implausible as a view of the badness of death, and it is not clear why this badness should not be considered axiological. It may not be a view of *intrinsic* badness, but given that it is supposed to be a view of the badness of death, it should be seen as a view of *extrinsic* badness.

Nevertheless, it is far from clear what TRIA is about. McMahan usually presents it as an alternative to Deprivationism, or, as he says in one of his chapters, a *version* of Deprivationism (p. 118). This suggests that TRIA is a view of the extrinsic value of death. It is therefore puzzling when McMahan later writes that 'the Time-Relative Interest Account is instead an account of what it is rational for individuals to care about for their own sake at particular times' (p. 121). This suggests that TRIA is rather a view about prudence. Perhaps it is supposed to be an account of both, but it remains unclear how this is supposed to work.

A more straightforward attempt to accommodate the intuition that the death of a young adult is typically worse than the death of an infant comes from Bradley. Bradley begins by noting that 'it seems unlikely that there is a sharp line dividing the entities that have genuine well-being from those that have it only in a derivative sense if at all' (p. 139). This observation prepares the ground for what he calls the Partial Welfare Subject View, according to which the badness of death equals the amount of goods of which the victim is

deprived multiplied by the degree to which the victim is a well-being subject. Since an infant is, presumably, a well-being subject to a lesser degree than a young adult, the Partial Welfare Subject View yields that the death of an infant is not as bad as the death of a young adult. If we find this result intuitively correct, then Bradley's account, it seems to me, is preferable to TRIA.

Not all chapters engage directly with TRIA or the potential worseness of dying as a young adult than as an infant. A noteworthy exception is Jens Johansson's chapter on Don Marquis' well-known anti-abortion argument. Apart from pointing out a serious tension between one of its premises and animalism—the view of personal identity endorsed by Marquis and generally assumed to be friendly to his argument—Johansson shows how certain considerations about personal identity and what matters in survival suggest that the badness of death is not as morally important as many have thought. In a somewhat more explorative chapter, Frances Kamm presents a number of objections to Deprivationism and offers a novel 'backward-looking' view of death's badness. Her discussion raises many interesting points but would have benefited from interacting with writers such as Bradley, Anthony Brueckner, and John Martin Fischer, whose work addresses several of these issues. Part two ends with an essay by Susanne Burri, in which she argues that there is a distinct way in which death is bad for us as agents. For those who seek more nuances in the badness of death than Deprivationism can offer, Burri's proposal should be a welcome addition to the literature.

Saving People From the Harm of Death has a lot more to offer than I have been able to summarize here. It is a collection of high-quality papers, many of which should be of interest to anyone working on the philosophy of death, and of particular interest to ethicists with a focus on the beginning or the end of life.

Department of Philosophy, Uppsala University, Sweden

KARL EKENDAHL