

# Feldman contra Epicurus



As we saw last class, Feldman argues, contra Epicurus, that even if both hedonism and the termination thesis are true, death can still be bad for someone who is dead.

Feldman argues:

- Death is *extrinsically* bad for a dead person just in case life would [probably] have been *intrinsically* better for that person had she not died at that time.
- In such a case, death is bad for the person because it has *deprived* the person of intrinsic goods she would [probably] have had otherwise.

# Four Puzzles for Feldman



Feldman's deprivation approach raises some questions:

1. How can death (or anything) be *bad* for one who doesn't exist?
2. How can we *compare* the values of goods and evils accruing to the living and the dead if the latter don't exist?
3. *When* is death bad for the deceased?
  - It seems it can't be bad for the person either while he is alive or while he is dead.
4. Why is early death generally worse than late birth?
  - In each case it may seem that the person would [probably] have been intrinsically better off if he had lived longer / been born earlier.

# Axiological Preliminaries



Axiology is the study of *value*.

Key notion: The intrinsic value for a person of a life

- How good is it *for its own sake*, w/o regard for consequences?
- How good is it *for that person*, as opposed to how good is it *for others*?
- How good *is* it for that person, as opposed to how good does that person *think* it is?

Given a simple form of hedonism, we can calculate the hedonic value for a person of a life.

- Sum the intrinsic value of all the pleasures the person experiences throughout that life and subtract the intrinsic *disvalue* of all the pains the person experiences throughout that life.
- This assumes, perhaps implausibly, that all pleasures and pains are *commensurable*, i.e., reducible to a single common unit of value.
- Feldman assumes this simple form of hedonism and the termination thesis solely for the sake of argument. Why?

# Axiological Preliminaries



## Intrinsic vs. extrinsic hedonic value

- Something is *intrinsically* bad/good for a person iff it is an instance of pain/pleasure.
- Something is *extrinsically* bad/good for a person iff the person would [probably] have been intrinsically worse/better off in its absence.
- (D): “The extrinsic value for S of P = the difference between the intrinsic value for S of the life S would lead if P is true and the intrinsic value for S of the life S would lead if P is false.” (p. 150)
  - Problem: (D) assumes that there is always a *unique* life one “would” lead if P were or were not the case. This is implausible.
  - Solution: Replace “intrinsic value” with “*expected* intrinsic value” and “the life S would lead” with “the *lives* S *might* lead.”
    - To calculate exp. value, multiple probabilities times intrinsic values for each possibility and sum together.
    - Hold fixed the actual past (almost) up to the time in question and consider the intrinsic value for S of each possible future.

# Solutions to the Four Puzzles



1. How can death (or anything) be *bad* for one who doesn't exist?
  - Extrinsic badness is not actual badness but hypothetical badness. It consists in the contrasting values of different possible futures for a person.
2. How can we *compare* the values of goods and evils accruing to the living and the dead if the latter don't exist?
  - We're comparing possible futures not actual ones. We don't have to assume that the person exists to make that comparison.
3. *When* is death bad for the deceased?
  - Eternally, since the extrinsic badness of death for a person consists in a timeless relation among abstract possibilities.
4. Why is early death generally worse than late birth? [my responses]
  - It may not be *coherent* to speak of someone's having existed earlier.
  - Even if it is coherent, we don't (*pace* Feldman) hold the span of the person's life constant. Rather, we hold the history of the world up to their (now earlier) birth constant and consider the possible futures.