

Deathⁱ

Jenann Ismael

Centre for Time, University of Sydney,

Department of Philosophy, University of Arizona

jtismael@u.arizona.edu

Denial of death

We don't like to think about our deaths, and there are cultural developments – social, technological, economic – that make it easier than ever before to live without constant reminders of our mortality. We hide the evidence of death. We live separately from our old people, and quarantine the dying in hospitals and hospices. It's impolite to mention death in conversation. We view death not as natural and inevitable stage of life, but as a calamity, a mistake, an accident. This attitude towards death isn't shared by all cultures, and it's a relatively recent development even in the west. The result of it, however, is a diminished appreciation of the finitude of life. We spend our lives in the way a foolish man spends his fortune as though there will always be more where that came from, Tolstoy, in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, perhaps the most famous literary portrait of the psychology of a dying man, captures how very easy it is – although we all know in an intellectual sense that we all die - to meet our ends with the shock the foolish spender feels when the last dollar is spent. With a sort of desperate plea 'Nobody told me it was going to end'. Ivan Ilyich (who has sustained a mortal injury in some stupid household chore... putting up a curtain rod) when he begins to acknowledge the signs of his impending death, thinks to himself

“In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it. The syllogism he had learnt from Kiesewetter's Logic: "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself. That Caius — man in the abstract — was mortal, was perfectly correct, but he was not Caius, not an abstract man, but a creature quite, quite separate from all others. ...Caius really was mortal, and it was right for him to die; but for me.. Ivan Ilych, with all my thoughts and emotions, it's altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible.”ⁱⁱ

It's hard not to smile in recognition of the sentiment. Part of what is being expressed here is that even if we are intellectually aware of the fact that people in general die, unless we live through the deaths of people who are vividly present to us in all of their particularity as persons, persons with histories - the complex,

altogether individual knot of memories, thoughts, experiences collected in an individual mind - could just *end*. When I say 'lived through the deaths of loved ones', I mean not simply that we've seen them disappear from our lives into the machinery of hospitals and elderly care facilities, I mean gone through the process of dying *with* the dying. What goes for the deaths of those we love goes tenfold for our own deaths. Ilyich can fathom Caius' death, because Caius is one man among many, just one name in the extended history of humanity. There are legions like Caius. Men like Caius come and they go. But he, Ivan Ilyich, is something altogether individual, irreplaceable and special. As he says

“He had been little Vanya, with a mamma and a papa, with Mitya and Volodya, with the toys, a coachman and a nurse, afterwards with Katenka and will all the joys, griefs, and delights of childhood, boyhood, and youth. What did Caius know of the smell of that striped leather ball Vanya had been so fond of? Had Caius kissed his mother's hand like that, and did the silk of her dress rustle so for Caius? Had he rioted like that at school when the pastry was bad? Had Caius been in love like that? Could Caius preside at a session as he did? ””ⁱⁱⁱ

Acknowledgement of one's own mortality - if it comes, as it did for Ilyich, at the end of life - is very often followed by the thought “Had I known, I would have done things differently. I would have spent my time, as the foolish youth says of a vanished fortune, more carefully.” One replays one's life in one's mind, and all of those wasted, worthless moments - the hours in traffic, the useless minutes in waiting rooms, the time spent with people one doesn't care for - stand out in sharp relief. It's a trite, but very familiar sentiment, heard time and again from people on their deathbed and people who have lived through a sickness or mortal scare or the death someone with whom they identify closely. It is as though the finiteness of the pile from which the moments of one's life are drawn attach to them a value that they don't have when it is supposed that there is an endless supply, as though the value of a moment is measured negatively by the degree to which it diminishes the whole. If a dollar drawn from a Bill Gates-sized fortune is worth less than a dollar drawn from my pocket, a dollar drawn from a literally *infinite* supply is worthless, because it leaves the pile undiminished. So this thought; ‘I didn't really realize it was going to *end*, if someone had told me, if they had made me really understand that there was not always going to be more where this came from, that every moment in my life is drawn from an ever diminishing pile, I would have done things wholly differently” reveals something important. It suggests that there's something to be gained by thinking about one's death while one is living, i.e., by adopting the perspective on one's life while one is making one's choices that one has when surveying it in retrospect. So reasons for wanting to write about death are only partly intellectual. On the intellectual side, there is the difficulty of grasping what it *means* to die. There is an incoherence, not easy to ferret out, in the idea of state of non-existence applied to oneself. On the practical side, I think it has something to teach us about life.

What is death?

First, some clarification in what is meant by 'death'. In forensic terms, the point at which biological death occurs is hotly contested (when the heart stops beating, when there is irreversible loss of brain function, when the body is not self-sustaining.... ?). The question matters for many of the same reasons the question of when exactly life begins matters, *viz.*, because it determines when laws and public policies that protect living persons are in play. What happens once the body ceases functioning, I don't know. It may be that we continue in some other form. One's attitude towards death will be shaped by one's beliefs in this regard, and we'll see in other essays in this volume a range of such beliefs. I am going to suppose that death is the permanent and unequivocal end of one's existence; I'm going to suppose, that is to say, that death is an end, and not merely a transition. I acknowledge hypothetical character of that supposition; it's in the same boat, in that respect, as any supposition about what happens after bodily death. On the hypothesis that death really is an end, what sort of a loss occurs when someone dies? Is it a loss that is redressed by a birth somewhere else, so long as the overall number of human lives is preserved? Is death to be feared? Who does it harm? It's not as though it hurts to be dead? It harms those who love and miss us, but that doesn't seem to bear the weight of the fear we feel at our deaths. What exactly *are* we afraid of when we fear death? Is it simply non-existence? Why, then, are we filled with horror at the thought that we might not exist a week or a year hence, but not at the thought that we didn't exist a week or a year before we are born? These are some of the questions that philosophers ask about death. The fact that it is not clear what the answers are points to the fact that our cognitive and emotional attitudes about death are murky and confused.

To understand what it means for one's life to end, we have to understand what it means for one's life to *continue*. And we can take some clues here again from Tolstoy's portrait of Ivan Ilyich. It's not an accident that when Ilyich thought of what it would mean for his existence to end, his mind turned to his memories: to the smell of the striped leather ball, and the rustle of his mother's dress. These legacies of personal history are what connect little Vanya to the schoolboy who rioted with the pastry was bad, the youth who loved recklessly, and the magistrate presiding at session. We don't confront every moment in our lives with a clean psychological slate. Earlier events leave an impression that forms the backdrop for what follows. We carry our pasts with us, not just as a collection of episodic memories - recollected images of past experiences - but in the form of a more or less explicit personal narrative: the story of our lives. And our understanding of that story forms an important part of our conception of *who we are*.^{iv} When we die, if death really is an end, the lines that support the transmission of autobiographical history are cut. For Ilyich, this means that when he dies, for example, there will be no one who remembers the smell of his striped leather ball or the rustle of his mother's dress. There may be others who remember that he had a striped leather ball and that his mother's dress rustled, but nobody who remembers it *as he experienced it*, with the full complement of qualitative and emotional resonances it had in the context of his history. There's an inexhaustible sensual and emotional richness to memories, that cannot be fully captured from an external point of view. The striped leather ball and the rustle of the mother's dress were meant to evoke something of the richness that even the most incidental memories.^v

It's not just the good memories that matter. The traces of our lives are so woven together that it is almost impossible to separate the good from the bad. And even if they could be separated, bad memories can play as much of a self-defining role as the good ones. There are memories of pain and emotional injury in my own past that I couldn't lose without losing something of myself.

Illyich's death means not only that his past will not be preserved, it means that it will not be continued. There will be no one in the future to act on his past intentions. His hopes, fears, plans will go unanswered, his projects will go uncompleted, his relationships will be arrested. Everything 'in the works' will be halted. Whether or not his story has reached closure, it will be the end of his story. (there are similar qualifications to be made here. Maybe a colleague will complete your experiments, or your children will make sure your book gets written... but again, I think, to the extent to which the qualifications are correct, they do, I think provide some consolation). There is no loss on the material level. The matter of which the body is made is recycled in the form of energy, but the self-defining information that is stored in the brain is lost, in the way that if you dismantle a computer, the matter is preserved, but the information stored in the files is lost. Loss of information is real loss. It's the only kind of real loss there is in a material world.

Death, on the assumption that it really is an end, involves a clean sweep of the psychological slate.^{vi} I've been suggesting it is horrifying, at least in part, because we identify with, and preciously guard the legacy of our histories. Unless we are all writing our very own *Rememberances of Things Past*, when we die, that legacy will be irretrievably lost. But that's only half of it. Just as important as the preservation of our history, is its continuation. If I die now, my hopes, intentions, and plans will go unfulfilled. My projects will go uncompleted. The promises I made to myself and to family, friends, lovers and mentors will go unfulfilled.^{vii} Aspects of my life whose significance hinges on uncompleted intentions will remain indeterminate, and to that extent I, myself, will not be well-defined. Nobody will know what I meant to do and to become. Relationships will be arrested, and something of the value of the hard times that cemented those relationships will be lost. My parents and children may not go unloved, but no one will love them the way I do, because that love is inseparable from the special ties that come with family and a history of shared experience.^{viii} All of this gives us an idea about what makes a particular, individual life *uniquely* valuable, i.e., why one death involves a loss that isn't redressed by a birth somewhere else. Human life is not fungible. Lives, unlike dollar bills, are not exchangeable for one another. To think there is no loss when one person dies so long as another is born, is as silly as thinking that it wouldn't have been a loss had Joyce's manuscripts been erased before they made it to press so long as there was no overall loss in the number of printed pages in the world, or that it wouldn't have been a loss had Vermeer's portraits been destroyed so long as there was no overall decrease in painted canvas. It is the particular individual constellation of thoughts, experiences, attitudes, hopes, wishes, dreams embodied in an individual human consciousness – i.e., the writing on the psychological slate built up over the course of a lifetime - that is the locus of (at least a good part of) what we take to be valuable about them. That is what is lost, what disappears from the world, when a person dies. Just as it's the particular configuration of letters on the page, or the particular arrangement of paint on the canvas that defines a lot of what we take to be valuable

about Joyce's manuscripts or Vermeer's manuscripts, and that is lost when the pages are erased or the canvas is painted over.

An animal that doesn't 'carry its past with it' in the way that we do, if it has a conception of self at all, it has a very shallow conception of self. When such a creature dies, there is a loss, but it's not the same sort of loss. Most pet owners are hard to convince that their pets are nothing but bundles of trainable dispositions; it's hard not to see your pet's responses to you as awareness of a narrative conception of your history together. But most of us are happy to accept that when cockroaches die there is no dissipation of the accumulated legacy of a lifetime, and no 'unfinished business' left behind. These points also shed light on why if you tell someone that they will not exist tomorrow or next year, they are horrified, but if you tell them that they didn't exist in the days or years preceding their births, they are unmoved. If the fear of death were the bare fear of non-existence, that asymmetry would be unexplained. We don't want to just *be alive*, we want to *continue* our lives, such as they are. We want to watch our children grow, finish our books, and live out the next stage in our marriages. We want to be there for our parents as they age. We want our personal stories to play out in the way we intended. In many cases, we need the later stages to give the earlier parts the significance we want them to have had.

Does anything matter?

Tolstoy (and this is part of what is being expressed in the story of Ivan Ilyich) had the idea that if life was finite, it couldn't be meaningful. It's hard to turn the fact that we die into a valid argument for the absence of meaning or value. No small amount of print in philosophy is devoted to picking apart the fallacies in some of the arguments that have been given. But the sentiment is familiar and robust even in the face of demonstrated fallacies. It goes something like this. Our lives are full of effort, plans, calculation, hand-wringing over what to do, who to marry, which career to choose, what path to take. We are thrilled when things go our way, and devastated when they don't. We live with intense involvement, treating ourselves, the choices we make, as though they *matter*, as though something hinges on them. But the fact that we die means that all of our schemes lead to the same end. What does it matter which path to annihilation? A friend once told me of a philosopher whose view was that life is like a leap off a great tall building. It just takes a while to hit the ground.

Tolstoy felt deeply that the only solution was to deny that life is finite, and for him that took the form of religious faith. More common, is the reply of the hedonist: "even if life is finite, a cigar and a good pinot noir is a good thing. Even a mortal man can enjoy a really good massage." In the words of Omar Khayyam, who has persuaded many a hedonist:

*"How sweet is mortal Sovranty!"--think some:
Others--"How blest the Paradise to come!"
Ah, take the Cash in hand and waive the Rest;
Oh, the brave Music of a distant Drum!"^{ix}*

The idea here is that others look, as Tolstoy did, to the promise of a hereafter to make life meaningful, Khayam recommends taking the cash in hand. The goodness of a glass of a decent pinot noir stands on its own. It doesn't require support from eternity.

To Tolstoy, cigars and wine seemed a ridiculous consolation for the injury of death, and his response to the hedonist comes in the form of a very powerful image. He writes

“There is an Eastern fable, told long ago, of a traveller overtaken on a plain by an enraged beast. Escaping from the beast he gets into a dry well, but sees at the bottom of the well a dragon that has opened its jaws to swallow him. And the unfortunate man, not daring to climb out lest he should be destroyed by the enraged beast, and not daring to leap to the bottom of the well lest he should be eaten by the dragon, seizes a twig growing in a crack in the well and clings to it. His hands are growing weaker and he feels he will soon have to resign himself to the destruction that awaits him above or below, but still he clings on. Then he sees that two mice, a black one and a white one, go regularly round and round the stem of the twig to which he is clinging and gnaw at it. And soon the twig itself will snap and he will fall into the dragon's jaws. The traveller sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish; but while still hanging he looks around, sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the twig, reaches them with his tongue and licks them. ... “ (Tolstoy, *confession*, chapter IV)

The dragon at the bottom of the well here is death, the white and black mice are days and nights that whittle away at the frail stem that separates each of us from death, and the honey for which the traveller reaches out with his tongue are the momentary pleasures of life. Tolstoy's suggestion here is that the momentary pleasures simply lose what intrinsic value they might have had in the context of a life that ends with death. And he concludes, rather ponderously, throwing off the mantle of the poet and donning that of the philosopher:

“and this is not a fable but the real unanswerable truth intelligible to all.”^x

An alternative

I want to suggest that is all the wrong way to think about it. The fact that we die means that our lives are framed, and frames are to be embraced. They are what allow lives to constitute meaningful wholes and lend the choices we make within life moment. They are what lend individual lives the complex internal architecture that makes life interesting/exciting/frightening and fascinating. That would be lost if lives didn't have endings. To get a feel for the importance of frames, think about what a really good meal is like. I don't mean a single course meal that is taken just to satisfy hunger, but the type of meal that makes dining an art. Meals, like lives, form discrete units. They have beginnings and endings, and a natural lifespan determined by a combination of appetite and palette memory. The parts of a good meal are combined on the palette of the diner in the way that the parts of a life are combined in the memory of the person who lives it. A finely organized meal satisfies appetite, lasts as long as the gustatory memory, and has a narrative or dramatic arc of its own. The aperitif is taken within the gustatory scope of the entrée, while the memory of the entree still lingers on the palette, and there is a complex development of tastes and textures, each simultaneously adding to what preceded, and creating expectations for what will follow. A good meal ends with a satisfying resolution that brings together the various culinary themes running through it.

Now, think about what it would be like if we had to eat more or less continuously, so that meals weren't discrete units, but bled off into one another without natural boundaries, i.e., so that life was just one long meal. There are two ways this could work. Either we could suppose that we have an infinite gustatory memory, so that one's palette retains the flavors of endless set of layers of strawberry on top of cod on top of chocolate, and so on. Or, we could suppose that memory has a horizon, retaining flavors of only a finite set of preceding mouthfuls, so that at any given time, one only retains tastes that go back a fixed amount of time. In either case, there are no beginnings and endings.^{xi} No return to a state of gustatory innocence, no fresh palette, rising crescendo of tastes, denouement, and resolution. There would be none of the satisfying sense of closure that comes when a meal is completed. This is not something we could want, I think, in the case of eating. We want framed units. Beginnings and endings mean fresh starts, resolution and closure. The same, I think, can be said for living. An endless life would be like an endless meal. An undifferentiated progression of one experience after another, without the arc of a life that starts with a birth, progresses through the ordinary stages, and has a final end. It wouldn't exhibit the rise and fall, the crescendo and diminuendo of life as we know it. We can put this point in topological terms. A framed, or finite space can have a more complex internal architecture than an infinite one, because points in a finite space can be differentiated by their relations to boundaries. We can supplement this point in a way that provides a counterpoint to Tolstoy's claim that a finite life would be meaningless, if we turn to examples drawn from art where the notion of meaning has more natural application. What I'm going to propose is the fact that lives are framed is essential to rendering them meaningful units.

Ask yourself what makes a painting, or a piece of sculpture, or a story meaningful. When we talk about meaning in this way, I think we have in mind a holistic dimension of value that is not reducible to the intrinsic qualities of its parts. To apprehend the meaning of a painting, a sculpture, or a story, you need to survey the whole, to see how its parts are arranged. The meaning doesn't reside in any part of the painting, and it's not a matter of whether the parts are intrinsically nice. Looking at a life as a whole and asking 'Was it meaningful? Does it add up to something' is like looking at a story, a song, or a painting as a whole, and asking, whether it is meaningful. In abstract terms, we would say it adverts to a holistic dimension of value that isn't analyzable into a kind of value that applies to its parts individually. The hedonist mistake (the mistake of someone who thinks the value of a life is an aggregate of the intrinsic pleasure of its constituent parts) is the mistake of thinking you get the best song by stringing together prettiest notes, or the best painting by an arranging pretty colors. If you apply at every point a local standard, based on the quality of notes, you'd end up (as children sometimes do) with string of identical notes, or a canvas covered with your favorite shade.

When we ask, of a life, was it well-lived – when we survey our lives, like Ivan Ilyich on his deathbed, and consider them as units – we see the events that constitute the life as a whole. We pull ourselves back from the concerns that drive day-to-day activity, and we ask whether there was some coherence to the life. Does it form a unified whole?^{xiii} Does it add up to something more than the sum of its parts. Were there a lot of false starts, half-finished projects, wasted time, equivocal choices. We all know what a painting looks like when the painter didn't know what he was doing. We've sat through movies that seem like a collection of disconnected episodes, read novels that don't go anywhere. A life that was not well-lived looks something like that: it is slapdash, arbitrary. It doesn't amount to anything. We see here a potential alternative to both Tolstoy and the hedonist, a conception of value that neither regards lives as meaningless unless we can see them as part of divine plan, nor reduces the value of a life to an aggregate of separate, momentary pleasures (the hedonists cigars and wine). A similar lesson could be found in a story related by Herodotus. Creosus after a display of his wealth asked Solon who was the happiest man he had ever known. Solon responded by telling the stories of relatively obscure men whose lives never attained the heights of wealth and fame that Creosus had reached already. When Creosus demanded to know how these men could be happier than he, Solon responded that no man could be counted happy until his death. We might read this as the suggestion that since things can always take a turn for the worse, we have to wait until the end to do the sums. But we might just as well read it as suggesting that happiness isn't something that accrues incrementally at all, but a kind of value that pertains to the whole and can't be assessed until all of the pieces of a life are assembled.

Whether or not this is true of happiness, as that word is used in English, I think it is true of what we mean when we often speak of the *meaning* of a life. When we say that we want our lives to be meaningful, we have in mind something that – like the meaning of a painting – unifies the parts, makes them amount to something. Our lives take shape under our direction in the way that a painting takes shape under the painter's brush, or a sculpture under the artist's chisel. We don't just live our lives, we *are* our lives. And our choices

should be guided by an idea of what we'd like to be. This is not to say that we have to treat every choice as self-defining, but it is to say that a life well lived always has an eye half-cocked on the big picture. It uses space conscientiously. If we think in these terms, we can make some sense of a line of thought that leads from acknowledgement of death to an appreciation of life's value. Knowing that you have a finite amount of time forces you to use it wisely. In life, unlike art, there aren't really any do-overs.^{xiii} Every choice to X is simultaneously a choice not to Y or Z. You might yet Y or Z later, but eventually you run out of later. In the end, the things you might have done but didn't, are things you didn't ... period. Of course the difficulty of all of this, is that we don't know how much canvas we actually have. There is the risk, at any point in time, of the brush being ripped from your hand. The most tragic deaths aren't always the ones that end a life early, but the ones that end a life mid-stream. They don't leave the canvas empty, but half-finished.

That doesn't mean that the right way to approach living is live each moment as though it is your last. That way lies the hedonist response; take the cash in hand. Nor – adamantly - am I recommending a life devoted to plans and projects at the expense of momentary pleasure. There are two independent dimensions of value here, neither reducible to the other, and often in tension. How you negotiate the practical dilemma is how you choose to live. These choices – big and small – fill up a life that is never guaranteed continuation beyond the present, and that is guaranteed eventual termination. Life is short, and precious. And precious at least in part because it is short. Nietzsche famously recommended that we treat our lives as works of art. One can read that as a recommendation that we try to give them the integrity and completeness of a work of art. But it is only because we are born and die – i.e., because our lives are framed by birth on one end and death on the other – that they can constitute meaningful wholes.^{xiv}

Conclusion

Aside from the familiar sentiment to make life count, there are two philosophical theses to be drawn from what I have said. The first was an answer to the Epicurean challenge to say what is bad about death, or rather to say how is a person harmed by his *own* death. The suggestion here was that one's own death involves both a loss of something that one values (i.e., the accumulated psychological legacy of a lifetime) and the failure to bring to fruition something (plans, projects, and relationships) in which one is invested. The second thesis was counterposed to Tolstoy's claim that death makes life meaningless.^{xv} The suggestion there was that however much we might wish at any given moment for our lives to continue, the fact that they do end makes discrete units of individual lives, and this discreteness is part of what allows a life to constitute a potentially meaningful whole. Bernard Williams once raised the question: if someone offered you an magical, immortality producing elixir that allowed you to live endlessly without physical degeneration, with the stipulation that the choice couldn't be revoked, would you take it?^{xvi} It's important in considering this to think beyond the extra decade or three to a literally *infinite* existence. My own view is that endless life would be as tiresome as an endless eating or a song that went on forever. That doesn't mean, of course, that I wouldn't want to live *longer*, or even that I ever want to reach the point of completion in my own life. I want to retain

an appetite for more of life right up to the end. But I can't help being grateful, in the abstract, that the ink will eventually be allowed to dry on my life, that it will present itself – for better or for worse - as a completed whole. That knowledge lends a *gravitas* to my choices, it gives me a canvas to work with.

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ⁱⁱ Tolstoy, L., "The Death of Ivan Ilyich", <http://www.classicallibrary.org/tolstoy/ivan/index.htm>, chapter 6.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv}The distinction between episodic and autobiographical memory is standard in psychological theory, and it is important here. Episodic memory is a 'reliving' of the individual's phenomenal experience from a specific moment in their past. Autobiographical memory involves explicit self-ascription of events in personal history. Autobiographical memory can be thought of as a weaving of episodic memories into a narrative form with an overarching spatial and temporal frame, and perhaps some imposition of causal structure. More than any other psychological capacity aside from rationality, the capacity for autobiographical memory has been seen as unique to humans. See Sutton, <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/stanford/entries/memory/>, for discussion and references. Unless otherwise specified, when I use 'memory', I will mean autobiographical memory

^v A film reference that's almost irresistible here would be Rosebud in *Citizen Kane*.

^{vi} Note that in saying that this is (part of) what is bad about death, one doesn't need to defend this as an account of what death *is*. One need only defend the claim that the badness of would be substantially mitigated by the preservation of psychological continuity.

^{vii}We can put this coldly in economic terms. To the extent to which we are invested in projects whose value depends on their completion, and relationships that depend in part on their continuation, a premature death robs the past of some of its value.

^{viii}One of the things that is so special about parental love, is that captures the whole of you under its scope. When Ilyich's parents look at Ilyich, they see the whole stretch of him, from little Vanya, through the presiding magistrate, to the dying man. It is that whole – not just the judge or the father or the spouse – but all of it, that they love.

^{ix} <http://www.okonlife.com/poems/index.htm>.

^xTolstoy, *Ibid.*

^{xi}Or there is at most one beginning, back when you were in nappies eating mashed peas.

^{xii} I've deliberately not said anything about what these larger, unifying sources of value are, because I take those choices to be personal, not just in the sense of 'at your discretion', but in the sense of 'self-defining'.

^{xiii} You can have a second wife, a second career, or a new start in various ways, but you don't get to erase the first.

^{xiv} On the relationship between integrity and completeness, we could have integrity without completeness if there was a bound on one end (endless accumulation in the forward direction), or partial integrity (e.g., an endless life components of various connected mini-narratives without any overarching narrative). A life like that would be like a sentence with commas, but no period. Our lives are more or less like that on the microscale, but because they are framed, we have completeness and closure on the macroscopic scale, and – unlike an endless sentence – they constitute intrinsically meaningful units.

^{xv} This view is also, of course, associated with existentialism.

^{xvi} Williams, Bernard. 'The Makropoulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality', in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge 1973).