

REFLECTIONS ON MEANING AND IMMORTALITY

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This article revisits Bernard Williams's influential argument that an immortal human life would be meaningless and argues for a shift in focus. There's good reason to keep Williams's framework for evaluating the prospects of meaning in continued life. But there's also good reason to abandon the conception of human psychology that he, and most of the vast literature in response, uses to fill in that framework. Focusing on values, as opposed to desires, reveals that the most pressing threats to a meaningful immortal human life are not repetition or satisfaction, but rather changes in what the world has to offer.

1. Introduction

In "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" Bernard Williams (1993) mounts an influential argument for the claim that an immortal human life would necessarily be meaningless.¹ His essay has spawned a rather

1. Williams characterizes his thesis in terms of meaning: "Immortality, or a state without death, would be meaningless, I shall suggest; so, in a sense, death gives the meaning to life" (Williams 1993: 73). But talk of meaning mostly drops out of his discussion, in favor of talk about desires and their connections with reasons. Thus, much of the commentary on Williams's discussion has focused on the desirability of immortality. It has also mostly characterized Williams's thesis in terms of a notion that Williams also doesn't clearly define: boredom. I will here take Williams at his word and characterize his discussion as focused on the question whether an immortal human life can be meaningful, where the meaninglessness at issue amounts to a certain sort of boredom. Given the structure of Williams's argument, this focus on meaning in life seems consistent with the literature. Calhoun (2015), for instance, distinguishes between two broad camps: views that evaluate lives according to agent-independent standards and views that evaluate lives by agent-dependent standards. Reasons feature in both kinds of view, even if not always the same kinds of reasons. I won't here puzzle out exactly how to categorize Williams's apparent view about meaningful lives, in part, because my aim will be to demonstrate the advantages of abandoning some of his core, substantive commitments.

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substantive literature. Perhaps it's a lofty aim to try and say something new on the topic. Nevertheless, that's what I hope to do here.

I'll begin by covering some familiar territory, laying out Williams's argument and some responses to it. The purpose of this is to reveal two commitments that have structured subsequent discussion. Almost all of the commentary on Williams's essay, whether supportive or critical, has proceeded on the assumption that his basic framework for thinking through these issues is correct. Moreover, philosophers have also largely accepted Williams's way of filling this framework in. My aim is to show the advantages of rejecting this second commitment. While I think there is much to recommend Williams's way of framing the question whether to continue living in the future, I think a promising way of moving the discussion forward involves rejecting his substantive claims about human psychology. I will argue that we have good reason to look elsewhere than to facts about human desire and that doing so brings new and helpful considerations into view. In particular, I will argue that if we shift from thinking in terms of desires, as Williams does, to thinking in terms of values, as I think we should, we learn that the greatest threat to meaning in an immortal life is not getting too much of what one wants, but rather the disappearance of what one takes to be worthwhile.

What follows is an invitation to reflect on familiar issues in a new light. I don't pretend that my arguments will once and for all settle old disputes; but I do hope that they will inject a refreshing viewpoint into what, for good reason, remains a lively debate.

2. Williams's Argument

Williams aims to

pursue the idea that from facts about human desire and happiness and what a human life is, it follows both that immortality would be, where conceivable at all, intolerable, and that (other things being equal) death is reasonably regarded as an evil. (Williams 1993: 73)

He is out to show that the human condition is such that one could die too early or too late. One dies too early when, according to Williams, one dies while still having reason to continue living; one dies too late when one outlives such reasons. For our purposes, we can focus on the issue of dying too late. We are interested in Williams's argument for the claim that an immortal life would be meaningless.

Williams's argument proceeds, in part, by examining the case of Elena Makropulos (EM), a character from an opera adapted from a play, who, at the time of the action, has lived for 300 years at the biological age of 42.²

Her problem lay in having been at it for too long. Her trouble was, it seems, boredom: a boredom connected with the fact that everything that could happen and make sense to one particular human being of 42 had already happened to her. Or, rather, all the sorts of things that could make sense to one woman of a certain character. . . (Williams 1993: 82)

This boredom, Williams tells us, "both kill[s] desire and consist[s] in the death of it" (Williams 1993: 83). The claim about EM, then, is that she lived so long that her desires no longer gave her reasons to continue living.

This leads us to the supposed facts about human desire that are bedrock to Williams's argument. He distinguishes between two kinds of desire. Conditional desires are for things one wants given that one will be alive—continued life is, then, the condition on such a desire. Examples include the desire for a fine meal, a nice vacation, or even a roof over one's head. Categorical desires, by contrast, are not so conditioned. They "propel [one] on into the future" and "resolve the question of whether [one] is going to be alive" by settling or preempting it (Williams 1993: 77). Examples of categorical desires are traditionally taken to include the sorts of things philosophers sometimes refer to as "projects," such as being a loving partner, fighting for justice, and finishing one's book.³ These two different kinds of desire, Williams tells us, play different roles in the context of resolving the question whether continued life would be desirable. Only categorical desires can give one reason to continue living.

Now we are in a position to articulate Williams's two requirements on having reason to continue living to some future time. Both requirements apply to one, at some particular time, contemplating whether to continue living, at some future time. The first, *identity requirement*, is that the future person must be identical to the present person. The second, *attractiveness requirement*, is that the life of the future person must be desirable to the present person.⁴ Categori-

2. Williams claims she's biologically 42; but perhaps it's more accurate to say she's biologically 37 (Fischer & Mitchell-Yellin 2014). Her precise age doesn't matter for our purposes here.

3. See Rosati (2013: 360–62) for an interesting critique of the distinction between and characterization of conditional and categorical desires. As Rosati points out, the same thing (e.g., finishing one's book) may be the object of either a conditional desire or of a categorical desire. The difference plays out in terms of satisfaction conditions and psychological roles.

4. I borrow the labels "identity" and "attractiveness" from Fischer (1994). An anonymous reviewer for this journal has pointed out that Williams's language suggests a slightly different reading of the attractiveness requirement than I have given here. On this other reading, it seems that what is required for the future to be attractive is that I can imagine a route to its desirability

cal desires are relevant to both requirements. Williams appears to think that in order for two people, present and future, to be identical they must share some categorical desires. And in order for a future person's life to be attractive to a present person that future life must "hold out some hopes for those desires" (Williams 1993: 83).

Williams argues that EM's case suggests that these two requirements cannot be met indefinitely, and this for reasons having nothing to do with the particularities of her case. Though she puts a face on the problems with human immortality, EM's situation is supposed to reveal a universal human truth: if one lived long enough, one would become bored. No matter what categorical desires one presently has, either one would eventually come to have different categorical desires, failing to satisfy the identity requirement, or one would cease to be gripped by the categorical desires one has, failing to satisfy the attractiveness requirement. No matter how long it would take, at some point either the future person will not be oneself, or one's future self will lack reasons to continue living.

There is, of course, plenty to quibble with in this argument, and philosophers have taken aim at various parts.⁵ For one thing, it's just not clear that we should accept the identity requirement (Temkin 2008; Fischer & Mitchell-Yellin 2017).⁶ Our personalities change in significant and widespread ways, even in the course of a mortal human life (Harris, Brett, Johnson, & Deary 2016). And we don't tend to think this means that we aren't the same people in old age as we were

from my current set of categorical desires. Thus, it seems that the attractiveness requirement shouldn't be put in terms of desirability, but rather something like potential desirability. However, Williams seems to have painted himself into a bit of a corner here. On the one hand, this alternative reading of the attractiveness requirement, involving an imaginative path, seems more charitable and perhaps truer to Williams's own terminology, involving my future life being "adequately related" to my present categorical desires. But I don't quite see how this is supposed to work in the context of his overall view. If the idea is that I can get from my current set of categorical desires to other desires that it would be possible to satisfy at that future time, then I seem to be imagining my future self as having different categorical desires than my present self. At the very least, even if I am imagining myself having some of the same categorical desires then as I do now, my assessment of the attractiveness of that future life appears to depend on categorical desires I do not now have. Perhaps this doesn't straightforwardly fail the identity requirement, as it's compatible with my having some of the same categorical desires then as I do now. But it does seem to violate the spirit of that requirement. What I find attractive about this imagined future life is only tangentially related to what I find attractive about my present life—it's not straightforwardly grounded in my character. It seems to me truer to Williams's view to hold that the attractiveness of a future life should be directly related to one's current categorical desires. It needs to be a desirable future life.

5. For a nice overview of the debate, see Pereira and Timmerman (2020). The discussion in the text here is by no means meant to be exhaustive.

6. Gorman (2017) offers an argument for the claim, as I understand it, that there may be good reason to accept an identification requirement, even if not Williams's identity requirement. Millgram (2004) provides a very different kind of argument against the identity requirement, one that proffers considerations in favor of boredom.

in our youth. Why should matters be different in an (extended or) immortal life (Fischer 1994)? One might think the issue isn't continuity of personality traits, in general, but categorical desires, in particular. But it's not clear that this will help. Our judgments about identity over time don't seem to track desires as much as other psychological traits (Strohming & Nichols 2014; 2015).⁷ Finally, some have argued that personal identity is not what matters anyway, but some less onerous connection between present and future persons, such as survival (Parfit 1971). Nevertheless, there does seem to be some force to the claim that my having reason to continue living in some future time requires that I can *identify* with the future person whose continued life I am contemplating. I will return to the notion of identification below.

For now, let's turn to the attractiveness requirement. Many philosophers appear to accept it, though they dispute Williams's claims about the inevitability of boredom. Some think that there are categorical desires that really could propel one on indefinitely, such as desires for things that can never be fully obtained or could be indefinitely repeated (Fischer 1994; Fischer & Mitchell-Yellin 2014; Gorman 2017). Some argue that, while Williams appears to be onto something, he overstates his case because it's a contingent matter dependent on one's psychology whether or not one would get bored over the course of an immortal life (Rosati 2013; Gorman 2017). However, one might level these criticisms while accepting Williams's assumption that our evaluation of the prospects of a meaningful immortal life should begin from facts about human desire. Indeed, much of the discussion has followed Williams in making this assumption.⁸ Thus, subsequent discussion of Williams's argument not only accepts the attractiveness requirement, but also Williams's way of filling in the relevant details about human psychology. I think this is unfortunate.

Of course, one may grant an opponent's premises in the context of arguing against his conclusion, not because one thinks those premises true, but because this is a way of mounting a more forceful critique. But there's a cost associated with this way of doing business. It can blind one to more fruitful

7. I will return to this point, below, in the context of arguing that we should shift to thinking about values, not desires.

8. There are exceptions. For instance, after her patient critical discussion of Williams's argument, Rosati (2013) offers a different way of thinking about our attraction to continued life, in terms of our valuing human existence as a source of reasons independent of desire. Calhoun (2018) discusses the issue of boredom for "evaluators." And Temkin (2008) considers the possibility that there are objective values that provide one with reason to continue living indefinitely, independently of facts about one's desires, projects, or character. In what follows, I'll join these philosophers in advocating for an appeal to value in the context of grappling with these issues. However, unlike Temkin, my appeal to values will remain squarely within the confines of Williams's identity and attractiveness requirements. And I will not here appeal to Kantian considerations, as Rosati does. I will discuss some of Calhoun's claims in detail, below.

ways of thinking through the issues. My contention will be that this is what's going on in the literature responding to Williams. I begin, in the next section, by arguing that we have good reason to abandon Williams's conception of the identity and attractiveness requirements in terms of desire. Then, in the sections that follow, I draw out two lessons we can learn from looking at things differently.

3. Valuing

We have seen that many critics of Williams's argument for the conclusion that an immortal life would be meaningless accept both his framework for evaluating the meaning of future lives and his way of filling that framework in. While I find a lot to like in the framework, I'm going to argue that we shouldn't fill it in as Williams does. Desires cannot do the heavy lifting Williams needs them to.

According to Williams, it's a fact about our psychologies that we can have two different kinds of desires: categorical desires and conditional desires. Furthermore, he claims that desires of the former kind both ground our persistence and give us reasons to continue living. They are central to his understanding of the identity and attractiveness requirements. However, there are reasons familiar from the literature in the philosophy of action to think that no kind of desire can play the role Williams casts categorical desires in.

The trouble begins when we accept that we may be alienated from our desires. If for any given desire in a person's psychological economy, we can ask whether that person identifies with that desire, it will not do to appeal to another desire to secure identification. Because we can ask the same question about the supposedly identification-securing desire, this road leads either to infinite regress or arbitrary table-thumping (Watson 1975). Thus, if one accepts that desires can be alien, one's account of identification with desires must appeal to something other than desire.

This conclusion being a conditional one, we should ask whether Williams is committed to the condition. He argues that EM is bored in the sense that all of her categorical desires are extinguished—"her boredom and distance from life both kill desire and consist in the death of it" (Williams 1993: 83). There are two ways to interpret the claim. First, we might take Williams to be claiming that EM's categorical desires died off in the sense that she ceased to have them—these desires are no longer part of her psychological economy. But then it's difficult to see how this person is even EM anymore, given Williams's identity requirement. If identity over time is a matter of continuity of categorical desires, then a person who lacks categorical desires at one time will not be

identical to a person who had categorical desires at an earlier time.⁹ EM's problem, then, could not have been boredom; she wouldn't have been around to become bored.

The second way to interpret EM's case of extinguished categorical desires is to take Williams to be claiming that she still has (enough of) the same desires to remain identical to her past self, but these desires no longer grip her in the right way to provide her with reasons to continue living.¹⁰ In other words, it's to claim that she is, in some sense, alienated from her categorical desires.¹¹ But if EM's trouble is that she's alienated from (even one of) her categorical desires, then Williams is committed to the claim that desires, even categorical desires, can be alien. So, he's committed to the condition in the conclusion of the above argument. Thus, his account of identification with categorical desires must appeal to something other than categorical desires. But what?

One possibility, following Watson (1975), is to appeal to values. We might claim that to identify with a desire is to value its object.¹² This would still allow us to say, following Williams's identity requirement, that a person at one time is identical with a person at a different time just in case their values are continuous.¹³ And it would allow us to say, following Williams's attractiveness requirement, that for a present person to have reason to continue living in some future time that future life must hold out hope for her values. But, as I shall argue in the next section, this change in how we conceive of the identity and attractiveness requirements draws our attention to very different considerations when it comes to evaluating the possibility of a meaningful immortal human life.

9. It won't do to posit that one might lack all but one categorical desire, such as the desire to remain alive. Williams claims that the desire to remain alive must "be sustained or filled out by some desire for something else" (Williams 1993: 78). Character, for Williams, must be constituted by multiple categorical desires. It's not clear how many are required.

10. It may now seem as if these desires are no longer *categorical* desires and we're back at the first interpretation. Perhaps there's no way of making sense of EM being bored in the way Williams claims she is. I'll proceed, in the text, on the assumption that there's some way of making sense of Williams's claim that EM becomes bored, consistent with his claims about identity.

11. For our purposes here, we need not analyze the sense of alienation relevant to this case. It's enough to claim that the case is one in which a person has a desire in the sense that it's in her head but does not identify with it in the sense relevant to it providing her with reasons to continue living, however that is to be understood. Anyway, we're in good company here. Fischer (1994), for instance, characterizes the attractiveness condition in terms of boredom and alienation; Gorman (2017) also takes the relevant requirement to involve lack of alienation.

12. Once again, for our purposes here, we can leave the notion of identification unanalyzed. But see Mitchell-Yellin (2014) and (2015). I'll sketch a conception of the attitude of valuing in short order.

13. Or we might relax the requirement in various ways. For example, we might say that the future person is relevantly similar to the present person given that it's intelligible how they got from the earlier set of values to the later one (Fischer & Mitchell-Yellin 2017; Fischer 1994).

Before moving on, however, I'd like to address two obvious questions. How are we to conceive of values? And why appeal to them, as opposed to some other constituent of one's psychological economy?

While I'm going to sketch a conception of what it is to value something, I admit that there are other conceptions and am not going to argue here that this one is correct.¹⁴ But we need something to work with, and this strikes me as a suitable conception. Take valuing something to involve a suite of interdependent dispositions.¹⁵ One is disposed to think the valued object is good; disposed to track it emotionally; disposed to see oneself as having reason to do so; and disposed to be motivated to respond to it in certain ways, such as to protect or promote it. Discrete values are made up of clusters of such dispositions with distinct objects. Because the cognitive, emotional, deliberative, and desiderative elements involved in valuing are deeply enmeshed elements of our psychologies, we have an initial reason to think that they are suitable attitudes to appeal to in the context of thinking about persistence and meaning over the course of one's life.

Though I don't have a knockdown argument in favor of this choice, there are further considerations in favor of appealing to values when filling in the substance of Williams's framework. For example, it's widely acknowledged that we're valuing creatures. So the proposal doesn't come out of left field. Moreover, there's an empirical case for the claim that one is identified with one's values. A series of recent studies suggests that identity over time is more dependent on the continuity of moral traits, such as values, than any other psychological or bodily characteristics.¹⁶ For example, when asked to consider a scenario in which they see someone they knew at age 25 for the first time in four decades, respondents were most likely to judge that the acquaintance was a different person than before if they exhibited changes in moral traits (e.g., losing the ability to judge right from wrong or losing sensitivity to others' suffering) than changes in personality, memory, cognition, preferences, or perception (Strohming & Nichols 2014). These researchers find the same pattern with respect to judgments about people suffering from neurodegenerative diseases (Strohming & Nichols 2015). People were more likely to judge that patients suffering from a disease that primarily affects changes in moral traits, such as frontotemporal dementia, were essentially different than they were to judge that patients suffering from a disease that primarily affects memory, such as Alzheimer's. The same pattern

14. For some considerations in its favor, see Mitchell-Yellin (2020).

15. Compare Knobe and Roedder (2009), Scheffler (2011), Schwitzgebel (2013), Tiberius (2018).

16. In correspondence, Shaun Nichols has helpfully clarified that their present interpretation of these findings is that these judgments concern changes in qualitative, but not necessarily quantitative, identity. Prinz and Nichols (2017: 450) clarify that they are focused on survival, not numerical identity.

holds for judgments about one's own personal identity over time and in cases where the moral change is chosen (Prinz & Nichols 2017). Taken together, these "findings suggest that folk notions of personal identity are largely informed by the mental faculties affecting social relationships, with a particularly keen focus on moral traits" (Strohmingner & Nichols 2015: 159).¹⁷

To be fair, it's not exactly clear how the notion of a moral trait in these studies maps onto the notion of values sketched above. One possibility is that moral traits are a subset of valuing attitudes, focused on the coordination of interpersonal relationships.¹⁸ But these studies do suggest that our judgments about the persistence of persons over time focus on evaluative elements of their overall character. And this is at least consistent with the claim that you are identified with your values, as understood above. Moreover, it would appear to provide support for the claim that the above notion of values is a better candidate than other candidate elements of one's psychology (e.g., desires, memories, personality traits) for the psychological construct that fills in the identity and attractiveness requirements. Again, these may be defeasible considerations, but they're not nothing. And what I hope to show in the following sections is that appealing to the notion of values in this context is informative, even if one isn't, in the end, convinced that it's the right way to go.

4. A First Lesson

Let's take stock. Williams's influential argument for the claim that an immortal life would necessarily be meaningless proceeds on the basis of an attractive framework filled in according to a particular conception of human psychology. I've suggested that there's reason to accept the framework but ditch the conception. In place of desires, I've proposed that we should focus on values. Doing so allows us to conceive of the identity and attractiveness conditions differently than Williams does. My goal now is to show how doing so helps us to evaluate the question whether an immortal life would be meaningless in interestingly different ways. I'll draw out two lessons from this shift in focus. In this section, I'll argue that it allows us to appreciate that the possibility of (repeated) satisfaction of our aims is not as pressing a threat to the prospect of a meaningful immortal existence as the literature often takes it to be. In the next section, I'll argue that the

17. Prinz and Nichols (2017) think moral values matter for both diachronic and synchronic identity. See, however, Franklin (2017) for an argument, with special attention to Bratman's account, against the claim that an agent is to be identified at a time with those psychological states that ground her identity over time.

18. Compare Scanlon's (1998) description of morality in the narrow sense as concerned with general principles for the regulation of behavior acceptable to those motivated to find them.

shift to values helps us to better appreciate the need to think about the world's future, and not just our own future psychologies. The overall point is that a shift in conception opens up new vistas and fresh perspectives on old ones.

Recall that Williams claims that EM's trouble is that she has become bored, in the sense that she's no longer engaged with life, no longer sees herself as having reason to continue living. Her life has become meaningless because she has outlived her identification with her categorical desires. Given his description of the case, Williams appears to think that this is because (repeated) satisfaction of her categorical desires has left EM cold. This interpretation fits much of the subsequent discussion in response to Williams's argument (e.g., Kagan 2012: 243; Calhoun 2018: 140). And as we've seen, a significant focus of subsequent debate has been about whether there are desires that can be repeatedly satisfied, perhaps forever, or whether there are desires that may, perhaps forever, be unsatisfiable.

But the shift from a conception in terms of desires to one in terms of values changes things. It makes sense for a desire to be extinguished once it's satisfied, but the same is not true of a value. So, what looks like a serious worry about immortality, given Williams's conception, dissipates in the light of an alternative conception of human psychology. Here's why.

A desire has a mind-to-world direction of fit in the sense that its psychological content has the illocutionary force of an imperative (Archer 2015). Just as it doesn't make sense to continue commanding something after it has been done, it doesn't make sense to continue desiring something after one has obtained it. For example, it doesn't make sense to continue wanting the watch that's on one's wrist. Of course, it makes sense to have closely related desires, such as the desire to keep the watch, to show it off, or to take care of it. The watch is part of the propositional content of all of these desires, but their psychological content includes different commands with respect to it. They're different desires.¹⁹ And the present point is that it makes sense for the initial desire for the watch to be extinguished once it's satisfied.²⁰

19. This may not always be reflected in language. One might give one's watch away, saying, "I don't want this watch anymore." This strikes me as shorthand for: "I don't want to keep this watch anymore."

20. At least, given a conception of desire open to Williams. On such a view, desires appear to be something like appetites; they are sources of motivation that capture one's attention and influence one's evaluations, and they can be put to rest, quieted or eliminated, when one obtains what they seek. This conception of desire may be contrasted with others, such as Scanlon's (1998: 39) "desire in the directed-attention sense," on which to desire something is to "insistently" have one's attention directed towards "considerations that present themselves as counting in favor of" it. On Scanlon's conception, desires reflect assessments of reasons, and it would appear to make sense to continue to desire something after one has obtained it. One may still see reasons for it. But this sense of desire is not open to Williams, on pain of circularity, since he thinks that desires are sources of reasons. Disagreement with the claims in the text to the effect that desires are apt to be extinguished once satisfied may, thus, reflect disagreement with Williams's conception of desire.

Importantly, this isn't to deny that the content of one's desire may be for something that is open-ended or indefinitely repeatable. But it is to claim that what staves off extinction in these cases is the content of the desire. My desire for self-improvement may be for something that's not fully realizable (Gorman 2017), and my desire for the pleasure of sex may be for something that's indefinitely repeatable (Fischer 1994). These are among those desires that are never fully satisfiable, due to the nature of their objects.²¹ But this is compatible with claiming that satisfying a desire extinguishes it.

Nor do I mean to deny that desires may persist even when they don't make sense. We aren't always rational, and it's possible to continue to want something one already has. But the fact that it makes sense to criticize one who desires what he already has shows that there's a rational connection between the satisfaction of a desire and its extinction.²² In the context of thinking about desires that provide one with reasons, this is all the connection we need. The reason-giving force of a desire is extinguished once it's satisfied, even if the desire itself sticks around in one's psyche.

Consider now the attitude of valuing. It makes sense to value a watch one doesn't have on one's wrist. One thinks it's valuable, cares about it (e.g., feels glad when one sees it in the store window), takes oneself to have reasons to do so, and wants to have it, take care of it, show it off. And it continues to make sense to value the watch once one gets it. One still thinks it's valuable, still cares about it (e.g., feels good when one sees it on the dresser, feels bad when it gets scratched), still takes oneself to have reasons to do these things, and continues to want to have it, take care of it, show it off. Obtaining something one values doesn't extinguish one's valuing attitude.²³ Indeed, in the typical case, one values things one is, in some sense, in possession of.²⁴ Valuing them is a way of

21. Something similar is true of the desires to protect or promote something, which are involved in valuing and will be discussed shortly.

22. When someone says they want something they already have, it's appropriate to respond with something like, "But you already have that watch." To which they might reply, "But I want another one." Or: "But I want *that* one." Or, they might simply say, "You're right. I forgot that I already had it."

23. In the next section, I'll consider the case of losing something one values and how this may extinguish the attitude.

24. The discussion in the text is illustrated with respect to an object, the watch. But it's meant to cover a wide range of cases, including people, relationships, careers, natural spaces, games, ideals, alone time, and so on. These strike me as proper objects of the cluster of dispositions constitutive of valuing. Articulating a sense of "have" or "possess" or "obtain" according to which we can all agree that one has or possesses or obtains, say, both a watch and a career, seems like a tall order. But I think there's an intuitive sense of these terms that can work for our purposes here. One possesses something in the sense relevant to valuing it when one's relation to it makes it possible to manifest the relevant dispositions—e.g., one can track its wellbeing and protect or promote it. In any case, there's no special problem here for an account in terms of valuing. How are we supposed

relating to them, given their presence in one's life. When it comes to values, obtaining the valued object is the beginning (or continuation) of valuing it.²⁵ By contrast, satisfying a desire for something should be the end of wanting it. This difference between the two attitudes makes a difference in the present context.

The first thing to notice is that if we fill in Williams's framework in terms of values, we haven't left desires behind. Part of what it is to value something is to tend to have certain desires (Watson 1975; Scheffler 2011; Schwitzgebel 2013; Tiberius 2018; Mitchell-Yellin 2020). At minimum, one tends to want to protect or promote things one values. Otherwise, one doesn't really value them.²⁶ It follows that to imagine a future life that satisfies the identity requirement—a life in which one has (some of) the same values one currently has—is to imagine a life in which one tends to have some of the same desires one currently has. The shift from desires to values is consequential, but not entirely radical. And the consequences of this shift suggest that, at least in typical cases, we have good reasons to think, contra Williams, that an immortal life would not necessarily be meaningless.

There are at least two reasons to think that the desires implicated in valuing won't be extinguished due to repeated satisfaction, that they're built, so to speak, to motivate one to stick around. The first is that it's not clear that these desires are satisfiable. The desire to protect or promote something one values would seem to be open-ended, perhaps like the desire to perfect oneself. It's a never-ending task that continuously calls for one's involvement.

This comes out when we consider how it is natural to describe the content of these and closely related desires. The infinitive construction—you desire *to* protect or promote that which you value—may be contrasted with desires the content of which is aptly put in terms of a *that*-clause—you desire *that* something be protected or promoted—and desires the content of which is aptly put

to make sense of "satisfaction" in a manner that allows us to say that one may satisfy, say, a desire for a watch and a desire for a career?

25. One may, of course, value the pursuit of something. But then it's the journey, so to speak, not the destination that's the object of the value. Once one has obtained the pursued object, it no longer makes sense to value the pursuit. It's over. Whether or not one goes on to value the thing obtained through that pursuit is a separate matter.

26. As Scheffler (2013: 22) puts it: "there is something approaching a conceptual connection between valuing something and wanting it to be sustained or preserved." My running example in the text is a disposition to want to protect or promote what one values, but I leave it open that valuing may involve other desires as well. I should add that I do not take the desire to "promote" a valued object to always entail that one is trying to bring about more of it; rather, the idea is that one wants to further its wellbeing, whatever that entails. And, of course, one might have a desire to protect or promote something, without valuing it, because one doesn't have the other relevant dispositions. Such a desire may even be a categorical desire. So, some of what I say in the text about the desires involved in valuing may be part of an argument, which I won't pursue here, against Williams's claims about necessary boredom.

in the form of a noun—you desire *the* watch. The difference in the contents of these desires makes a difference in what we can reasonably expect with respect to the longevity of the reasons to continue living associated with them. The desire for the watch is more straightforwardly satisfiable than the desire that it be protected or the desire to protect it, and it seems reasonable to expect that the reasons to continue living associated with it are, correspondingly, less likely to persist.²⁷ But there are crucial differences between these other two desires as well. The desire to protect something, as opposed to the desire that it be protected, typically implicates one's own involvement. It motivates you, first, to be around to do the protecting and, second, to keep a watchful eye on that which you want to protect. I don't here want to take a stand on the question whether desires give us reasons or reflect our judgments about reasons.²⁸ My point is that the desires involved in valuing would appear to either provide us with or reflect our recognition of especially long-lasting reasons to continue living. Part of what's involved in caring about something is being disposed to be motivated to care for it, and it's just not clear that this job is ever done—so long as the thing you care about is still around, which is a point I'll turn to in the next section.

But even if you're not convinced, a second reason to think these desires and the reasons associated with them wouldn't be extinguished due to repeated satisfaction is that they are buttressed by the other elements involved in valuing. One wants to protect or promote this thing, in part, at least, because one is disposed to think it's good, because one is disposed to have an emotional attachment to it, and one is disposed to see oneself as having good reasons for doing so.²⁹

27. An anonymous reviewer for this journal has pointed out that there are different levels of generality of desires. I might desire a particular watch, or I might desire the latest gadget. And it seems as if the more general the object of the desire the less satisfiable it would be. While my desire for a particular watch may be easily extinguished, my desire for the latest gadget will simply attach to whatever Apple unveils next. There is something to this. But it's worth noting that the problem of repeated satisfaction—say, getting the newest gadget each year—still plagues the general desire. This doesn't seem to be a problem for the desires implicated in valuing, as I go on to discuss in the text.

28. Though, see Footnote 20, above.

29. The claim in the text need not be about the origin of these desires. Perhaps one originally had the thing and wanted to protect it, and only later did one come to care about it and think one had good reason to. Nevertheless, now that one does care about it, this will serve to buttress the desire to protect it. An anonymous reviewer for this journal has suggested that Chekhov (2004) provides a nice literary illustration of this. Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna come to love each other deeply only after a long period of protecting their secret, more-or-less detached romance. Perhaps a more mundane example would be a family heirloom. You came to have it only because your grandmother gave it to you, and you were motivated to protect it when you moved. Now you want to display it in your new home. But it wasn't until you unpacked it that, looking for an appropriate shelf, you realized you now thought it was a worthwhile thing to display and were relieved it had survived the trip.

To value something is to have a nexus of interdependent tendencies. And the other dispositions involved in valuing that buttress one's desires to protect and promote what one values also appear well-suited to propel one into the future. Think, in particular, about what it takes to emotionally track the wellbeing of something you value and to see yourself as having good reasons to do so.³⁰ If you don't exist, then you can't feel anything in response to how something is faring. What's more, mere existence isn't enough. You need to be in a position to grasp how the thing you value is faring.³¹ The disposition to emotionally track the wellbeing of what you value is bound up with reasons to stick around and to remain in close enough proximity to the valued object so as to monitor it's wellbeing and, appealing now to the desire to protect or promote it, intervene when necessary. The emotional, desiderative, and deliberative dispositions involved in valuing something are, as a whole, intimately bound up with enduring reasons to continue living.

Of course, there are limits to the propulsive force of these dispositions. For one thing, there are more and less direct and indirect ways to protect or promote something one values. I might protect my watch by wearing it on my wrist wherever I go; I might entrust it to another, with explicit instructions for how to keep it safe; or I might put it in a safe deposit box. These options range from more hands-on to hands-off, and not all require my continued existence. Once it's in the deposit box, and given enough confidence that it will remain safely there, my desire to protect my watch need not provide or reflect reasons for me to continue living.³² My work here, as they say, is done. But what about my disposition to track its wellbeing? Typically, this will be bound up with reasons to continue living. I may still see myself as having good reason to check in every once in a while to make sure the institution with which I've deposited my watch is still standing and my valuable still secure. But we can imagine scenarios in which this is not the case. Suppose, for example (and perhaps per impossibile—but we are talking about immortality here, anyway), I have consulted a trustworthy oracle who informs me my watch is forever safe. I've got it on good authority

30. I don't mean anything particularly loaded or fancy by "wellbeing." I assume that an artifact may far better or worse, as can individuals, practices, institutions, and so on. The claim is that to value something is to be emotionally attuned to how it's doing. I'll use the term "wellbeing" to mark this aspect of the object of relevant emotions, but the reader may feel free to substitute any other term they feel better describes what I'm after.

31. This gives some more specific sense to the claim that one must possess a thing in order to properly value it.

32. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this journal for raising this challenge. It's worth noting that this would still seem to involve a desire *to* protect the watch, and not the closely related desire *that* it be protected. My involvement in the protective arrangements is still crucial to satisfying my desire. It is I who deposits the watch and pays for the protection. It's not all the same to me how the watch ends up in a safe place.

that I have nothing to worry about, my protective services are no longer needed, and my valued watch will fare nothing but well. It seems I can rest assured; my reasons to emotionally track the wellbeing of my watch are no longer bound up with my continuing to live. Cases such as this one show that the reasons associated with one's values may not necessarily endure an immortal life, but they don't show that they won't typically do so. And that would seem to be enough for our purposes.

The takeaway is that, even if we think that repeated or prolonged satisfaction of categorical desires is bound, at some point, to result in their extinction and a resulting lack of reasons to continue living, we needn't think that this would be so for those desires bound up with one's values. The latter may be unsatisfiable or, even if they are, they're interdependent with other tendencies in a manner that suggests their propulsive force will be more robust in the face of repeated and prolonged satisfaction than that of the desires to which Williams's argument appeals. When we shift to thinking in terms of values, the prospect of extinguished desires due to repeated satisfaction no longer appears to be such a pressing worry.

Perhaps, however, this is all too fast. Perhaps there's good reason to think that one's values and the reasons for continuing to live bound up with them wouldn't survive an immortal life, even in the more typical cases. Calhoun (2018: 138) distinguishes between something's "bearing value qualities" and a valuer "'making use of' those value qualities." Something may retain its value qualities indefinitely, but people "rarely if ever have inexhaustible capacities for doing something with the value qualities they encounter" (Calhoun 2018: 139). Thus, it seems as if our engagement with the things we value will wane over time, not due to the fact that they're no longer valuable or we no longer think that they are, but due to the fact that we can no longer engage with them in the ways that constitute valuing them.

It doesn't take too much imagination to come up with cases that seem to support this claim. Take, for example, the disposition to emotionally track the wellbeing of one's watch and the disposition to desire to protect it. Both are involved in valuing the watch. But one might fail to be motivated to avoid another scratch on its surface and not feel bad in the least when it gets one. One might think that the thing to say is that one has ceased to value the watch because one has ceased to exhibit some of the behaviors involved in doing so. Moreover, one might think that the culprit here is too much time. You no longer care about the watch because you've had it so long.

It's not so clear, however, that we should think these things. To begin with, there seems to be a rather straightforward reason to reject the claim that given enough time one's capacities to engage with the objects of one's values will eventually extinguish. It isn't difficult to come up with cases in which people value

things for very extended periods of time, including (just about) their entire lives. Consider the die-hard, born-this-way Red Sox fan who still follows the offseason trades, tunes in during spring training, and agonizes over October defeat (or cheers October triumph!). Or consider the octogenarian married since she was eighteen who lies next to her husband holding his hand as he passes away in hospice, concerned to make sure he feels no pain. Or consider Butch, in “Pulp Fiction,” who risks his life to retrieve the watch handed down for generations in his family. This is a small sampling of what would seem to be a limitless array of cases in which someone continues to value something, continues to fully engage with it as valuable, even though they’ve been at it for a long time. While it may be true that our capacities for engaging with what we value are not inexhaustible, it seems equally true that these capacities are not necessarily going to be extinguished given indefinitely long exercise.

But suppose you’re unmoved. After all, it’s unclear what evidence claims about valuing in a mortal life provide us for claims about valuing in an immortal life. You might think that, given enough time, one would eventually cease to engage with the things one values. This brings us to the claim that ceasing to exhibit the behaviors characteristic of valuing something entails not valuing it. This claim stands behind the present challenge, but it is false given the conception of valuing we’re working with. On our conception, to value something is to possess a range of interdependent dispositions related to it. And the failure to exhibit relevant behaviors may be due to the fact that one’s disposition is masked, not to the fact that one lacks the disposition. Perhaps one’s too tired or distracted to care, in the moment, about scratching the watch. The kids need to be fed, do their homework, go to sleep. This doesn’t mean one isn’t disposed to emotionally track the wellbeing of the watch. Rather, it means that one fails to manifest this disposition and feel bad about the scratch because one has other things going on. Since valuing the watch involves being disposed to track its wellbeing emotionally, this is all consistent with still valuing it. What’s more, insofar as one exhibits the other dispositions involved—one still thinks the watch is valuable and sees oneself as having reasons to care about it—we have good grounds for attributing the unmanifested dispositions to one and claiming that one values it, even if one doesn’t exhibit all of the expected behaviors at this time.³³ Not every valuer will exhibit all of the expected behaviors all of the time. But there’s a difference between not exhibiting emotions or motivations because one doesn’t value something and not exhibiting them because one’s disposition to do so is masked. In the latter case, one may still value the thing. And that’s

33. There are tricky questions in this vicinity regarding unmanifested dispositions. But see Mitchell-Yellin (2020) for further discussion of cases in which one values something but doesn’t exhibit all of the relevant behaviors.

enough to call into question some of the cases marshaled in support of the claim that engagement with the objects of one's values is bound to dissipate and extinguish over time.³⁴

One last point will provide a bridge between the discussion in this section, about how the shift from desires to values should make us less concerned with issues of satisfaction and repetition over the course of an immortal life, and the discussion of the next, about a catalyst for boredom that has been comparatively neglected in the literature. Even if one's disposition to care about something one values is masked, there may be ways of reawakening it, so to speak. Go back to the parent distracted from caring about his watch because he's trying to get the kids to bed. It's one thing to fail to feel anything in response to the watch face getting scratched; it's another thing to fail to feel anything in response to possibly losing the watch forever. Our busy parent may not feel bad about the scratch, but he may have an intense emotional reaction when he notices that the watch is about to be taken out with the recycling. The flip side of the point, made above, that coming to possess something one values doesn't mean it makes sense for that value to be extinguished is that losing something one values does appear to pose a threat to valuing it. Perhaps it makes sense to continue valuing something one ceases to possess in a literal sense, so long as that thing still exists and one is reasonably well-informed regarding its wellbeing. It seems appropriate to say that our parent still values the lost watch because he is anxiously digging through the recycling bin to retrieve it before the truck comes. But the same doesn't seem true about valuing something that no longer exists. Once the watch is melted down at the recycling plant, our parent's value statements about it shift to the past tense. He may be upset because he valued the watch so much, but it doesn't make sense for him to say that he still values it.³⁵

5. A Second Lesson

Valuing something makes sense when one is, in some sense, in possession of it. This marks a difference between valuing and desiring. And it cuts both ways. On the one hand, it means that an immortal life need not be expected to result in extinguished values or associated reasons to continue living on the grounds that it would include repeated or prolonged possession of the objects of one's values. On the other hand, it does mean that impediments to possessing (or even reasonably pursuing) the things one values would frustrate one's values, perhaps

34. Calhoun's (2008) discussion of estrangement and depression provides other reasons for thinking that lack of engagement is compatible with continued valuing.

35. Though he might still value his memories of it, and so on.

resulting in their extinction or a lack of reasons to go on. And this means that the world outside one's own head will play an important role in determining whether or not an immortal life would be meaningful.

It makes sense for one to want something that doesn't exist.³⁶ Indeed, many of the things we have, we have only because someone wanted it though it didn't exist. They invented it. One may even desire something that no longer exists. But it doesn't make sense for one to value something that doesn't exist. One might think it would be good if it (still) existed. But one can't track its wellbeing, let alone rationally see oneself as having good reason to do so, nor can one rationally desire to protect or promote it. One can't protect or promote something that's nonexistent. Again, one can bring it into existence, but that's not the same thing.³⁷ Hence, one's values are, in a sense, subject to the whims of the world in a manner that one's desires are not. If the world no longer offers up the object of one's valuing attitude, the reasonable thing is to no longer have the attitude.³⁸ If the world doesn't offer up what one wants, by contrast, it can make sense to go out and try and bring it into existence.

This point has important implications for the prospects of a meaningful immortal human life. An immortal valuer would be around for a long time, and there are bound to be things that she values that will go out of existence, never to return. She may, for example, value her relationship with a mortal. This value would extinguish upon his death. It doesn't make sense to value a relationship that's no longer possible and death (absent certain assumptions) makes familiar forms of interpersonal relationships impossible.³⁹ She may wish he hadn't died; she may cherish the memories; she may believe it would be good if he were still

36. Perhaps we should add the stipulation that one must believe one can bring it about.

37. To repeat a point made above, one might value the pursuit of something. One may even value the project of bringing it into existence. But this isn't the same thing as valuing it. There's nothing yet to value. This is all compatible with claiming that it makes sense to think it would be good if it did exist. On the account we're operating with here, valuing something involves more than simply thinking it is or would be good, even good for one to adopt as an end. It involves being disposed to track it emotionally and being disposed to want to protect or promote it. One can't emotionally track something that's not there to be tracked, nor can one protect or promote non-existent things. And to repeat another point made above, it's not enough that the object of one's emotional disposition merely exist; one must also be able to grasp how it's faring.

38. The qualification "reasonable" allows that one might have recalcitrant values, which don't extinguish when they should.

39. Norlock (2017) argues that one can have real relationships with the deceased on the grounds that they may still be proper *relata* in meaningful relations. This argument, however, appears to trade on a conflation between relations and relationships. I can accept that it's possible to continue to relate to the deceased in imaginal ways, as Norlock claims, without thinking this amounts to maintaining a relationship with them, because relationships, but not relations, require that all parties be capable of satisfying standards and dead people can't do that. The parenthetical remark in the text signals that things may be otherwise if we assume, for instance, that people survive bodily death as disembodied souls that can interact with the living.

alive. But just as it doesn't make sense to value a watch that's been melted down, it doesn't make sense to value a relationship once the other person is deceased. One could value the memories or the pursuit of a replacement, but these aren't quite the same thing as valuing the relationship. And what goes for relationships goes for any manner of other potential objects of one's values—works of art, natural spaces, careers, and so on. There are bound to be many changes to one's environment over the course of an immortal life, and some of these changes will involve things one values going out of existence. It follows that it's reasonable to expect that, over the course of an immortal life, some of one's values are likely to be extinguished simply because the world will change.

It seems possible to adopt categorical desires that can burn hot across the temporal expanse of an immortal life; perhaps it's also possible to adopt values that are immune to the vicissitudes of a changing world. I'm not sure about this.⁴⁰ But the point remains that when we conceive of ourselves as valuers and imagine, from this perspective, the prospects of an immortal life, our focus is naturally drawn to questions about what the world will be like far in the future. And this is because what the world is like impacts our values in ways that it doesn't impact our desires. Put another way, when we consider Williams's attractiveness requirement, conceived of in terms of values, we are forced to attend to matters external to our own psychologies in a way we are not forced to when we conceive of the requirement in terms of desires. The change in focus, from desires to values, changes the conversation.

Some discussion of these issues reflects concern with what the world will afford us in the future. For example, Calhoun (2008: 203) claims that "'existential' boredom" is compatible with continuity of values and that the "hospitableness of the world" is one of the "background conditions that support our ability to project ourselves into the future" (2008: 197). Also: "Sometimes the world disappoints, failing to provide value qualities worth our doing something with. At other times, the difficulty is that we have used up our capacity to engage with a value quality" (Calhoun 2018: 139). But Beglin nicely summarizes the state of the literature in the following characterization of Williams's view:

Williams doesn't deny that the world contains enough value to, in theory, sustain a meaningful immortal existence. He doesn't think, in other words, that we'd necessarily become bored because we'd necessarily run out of valuable things with which to engage. His worry, rather, concerns

40. Williams (1993: 87) claims that boredom must be "unthinkable" for us to have confidence that we will have reason to continue living indefinitely far in the future. Putting aside the worry that this is asking too much (Fischer 1994), the present discussion brings out the difficulty that this requirement asks something both of us and of the world. How does my confidence in the eventual destruction of this planet relate to Williams's unthinkability condition?

our ability to continually engage with those valuable things in the first place. *His worry isn't about the world or our environment; his worry is about us and our agency.* (2020, italics mine)

My point is that, given the shift to values, Williams's worry appears misplaced; at the very least, it appears to overemphasize one issue and ignore another. We should be less concerned with losing our ability to engage with those things we value, and more worried about losing those things we value. We should be less concerned with our agency and ourselves, and more concerned with the world and our environment.

6. Remaining Concerns

Before wrapping up this discussion with some concluding remarks, I want to issue a clarification of my thesis and address two worries about how I've characterized the literature spawned by Williams's discussion.

The clarification is that I'm not claiming that a shift in focus from desires to values shows that an immortal human life could never be meaningless. Rather, my claim is that the threat immortality poses to living a meaningful human life looks very different once we make this shift in our thinking about the issues. This is at once an invitation to reframe the discussion and a challenge to Williams's argument that immortality would necessarily be boring. The values-based conception of human psychology imparts lessons about what's required for us to remain engaged with life that call our attention to the contingency of boredom. And one key lesson is that our continued engagement depends on the continued existence of that which engages us. A world that no longer contains something one values is one in which one no longer has the same reasons to continue living.

One worry about all this has to do with what I've claimed is gained by shifting our focus from desires to values. Scheffler (2013) has an extended discussion of the ways in which the future loss of projects, activities, and people we value would undermine both the meaning we could find in life at that future time, as well the meaning in our present lives. This discussion is very much in line with what I've characterized as a new way of looking at the issues that comes with adopting a conception of human psychology in terms of values. Accordingly, it may seem as if I've overstated my case; there's not much new to see here.

I have two things to say. The first is that Scheffler, himself, conceives of the relevant facts about human psychology in terms of values (Scheffler 2013: 16–17). So, this example seems to support, rather than undermine, my claim that we open up new vistas given a shift in conception. Second, even if Scheffler's discussion covers some of the same territory as this one, it focuses only on a

narrow slice of the pie. The loss of the valued relationships, traditions, projects, and practices that depend on future people is a sure threat to a meaningful life. However, even if humanity were to continue on, it's possible that plenty else one values would cease to exist. The consensus is that our environment will radically change over the next few years and decades. Those of us who value time outdoors, visiting natural and human-made landmarks, time at the beach, and so on, face the very real prospect of a future without such things. We are at risk of living meaningless lives in the future because we've lost the ability to engage with the things we value. This loss isn't due to our psychologies, but to our environment.⁴¹ And the expected loss far outstrips what even Scheffler appears to be concerned with.⁴²

A second worry about my characterization of the literature has to do with my portrayal of Williams as arguing that categorical desires are extinguished due to their (repeated) satisfaction. It may seem as if this leaves out an important piece of his argument. Pereira and Timmerman (2020: 3) characterize Williams as claiming that "given enough time, you would either satisfy or lose interest in *all* categorical desires you currently have." That is, in addition to repeated satisfaction, they take Williams to be concerned with loss of interest. It's worth considering whether I've omitted something important from this discussion.

As examples of lost interest, Pereira and Timmerman mention giving up on writing a novel or wanting a political revolution.⁴³ Let's think a bit about why one might lose interest in these pursuits. Perhaps it's due to repeated success. You've written so many novels that you simply don't care to write any more. We can put this possibility to one side, as it amounts to extinction by satisfaction and we're interested in whether one might lose interest by other means. We can also put aside a second possibility, which is that you simply stop wanting to do these things for no good reason. This may be a plausible explanation for the extinction of conditional desires. But it seems to treat categorical desires too lightly. These are, after all, supposed to be desires that propel one into the future, give one reason to continue living, constitute one's character. Sure, people are complex and vexing. But before we accept the claim, we should at least want some good reasons to think that we arbitrarily shed core features of our characters like this.

41. The extent to which this loss is due to our agency is a different matter, one that cannot be adequately taken up here.

42. Though, to be fair, it seems clear from some of his remarks that Scheffler (2013) is concerned with issues raised by the specter of climate change. My point is that this concern is, in his case, routed through the continued existence of the human species. This is a comparatively narrower focus than the one I'm advocating for here.

43. The notion of lost interest strikes me as different from that of disappointment, as discussed by Calhoun (2018: 136–37). In the latter case, the problem is with one's pre-formed expectations for engagement with the valued object; in the former case, it's about a change in one's relationship to the valued object in the process of engaging with it.

This is not to say that we can't lose interest in categorical desires. It's to insist on a reasonable explanation when we do—that is, an explanation other than repeated satisfaction. Perhaps one could lose interest due to repeated failure. You want, very much, to write the novel; it's a core feature of your identity. But after so many years, you've made little progress. So, you lose interest. This seems like a real possibility. So does the possibility that you've always very much wanted to write a novel but never had the time to get started. In both cases, we can ask what frustrates your attempts to finish or to get started. And it seems as if there are at least two possibilities. On the one hand, you might get in your own way—your pessimism about your talents make it so you can't seem to get yourself to sit down and finish, or even begin, though you have the time and resources. On the other hand, the world might get in your way—something always comes up, perhaps small things over and over again or perhaps a major crisis, precluding your getting to write. It may even be the case that the world frustrates your attempts to the point that you come to believe it's impossible for you to get the thing done.

These appear to present reasonable explanations for losing interest in a categorical desire, and it would be nice to see more discussion of them in the literature responding to Williams. The point to notice at present is that the second possibility illustrates that concern about the world, in the context of evaluating the prospects for a meaningful immortal life, is not confined to a context in which we conceive of human psychology in terms of values. It applies in the context of a desire-based conception as well. The fact that it hasn't received much attention shows why the shift to values may be helpful, even if it doesn't ultimately carry the day. This shift draws our attention to a factor that appears to be too easily overlooked if we conceive of the issues just in terms of desire. The lesson may stick, even if the way it was arrived at proves less than compelling.

7. Conclusion

I've argued that even if we accept Williams's framework for evaluating the prospects of a meaningful immortal human life in terms of the identity and attractiveness requirements, there may be good reason to fill this framework in with facts about values, as opposed to desires. And doing so sets us up to learn two lessons. First, we can see that (repeated) satisfaction is not the main threat to meaning in an immortal human life; and second, we're better able to recognize the serious threat posed by what a changing world will afford us in the future.

I want to conclude with some remarks about how the foregoing may contribute to the future of this debate. Williams's discussion of the prospects of a

meaningful immortal human life has a lot to recommend it. And I hope to have demonstrated that his framework for evaluating the issue is flexible in the sense that it may be filled in by various substantive facts about human psychology. While I've focused on values here, there are other attitudes one might appeal to. Indeed, one might reject the move away from desires. Nevertheless, the above arguments against the appeal to desires and in favor of the appeal to values present interesting challenges for those who would hew closely to Williams's conception of human psychology or blaze other new trails. Meeting these challenges or advocating for these possibilities would contribute nicely to the ongoing debate. So would grappling with the above claims about over-concern with our psychologies and lack of concern with the world. Indeed, this last point opens up further avenues for reflection, such as how exercises of our agency may impact the prospects for meaning in future life by impacting what the world has to offer. It seems, for the time being, at least, we have plenty of reason to keep Williams's discussion of meaning and immortality alive.

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