

Death and the “Afterlife” (Part 2)

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April 14, 2022

The Afterlife Conjecture

Reflecting on the Doomsday Scenario and the Infertility Scenario, Scheffler makes the following conjecture.

The Afterlife Conjecture: With no afterlife (e.g., in the Infertility Scenario), people would cease to value, engage in, and be emotionally attached to many activities and pursuits—even those meant to deliver immediate gratification.

We can ask several questions about this.

1. Is the Afterlife Conjecture *true*?

Which activities and pursuits do you think we would cease to value, engage in, and be emotionally attached to? *All* of them? Only *some* of them? Which ones?

2. If the Afterlife Conjecture *is* true, why is it true? For *psychological* reasons (regarding the relationship between our *belief* in the afterlife and our motivations)? Or for other reasons?

Distinguish between the following three dependencies:

- *Attitudinal Dependency Thesis.* What matters to us—the things that we *value*—depends on our confidence in the existence of the afterlife.
- *Evaluative Dependency Thesis.* Things matter—are *valuable*—only if there is, in fact, an afterlife.
- *Justificatory Dependency Thesis.* We are justified in attaching importance to things—we have good reason to value them—only if there is, in fact, an afterlife.

3. If the Afterlife Conjecture is true, would those responses be the *correct* ones to have? *Should* we respond that way?

Distinguish between two ways of interpreting the question:

- *Practical Question.* Would it serve your goals to respond in that way?
- *Aptness Question.* Is responding in that way *apt* given the situation?

Here are some activities/pursuits that it might be helpful to think about:

- Medical research (e.g., looking for the cure for cancer)
- Political activism
- Creating works of art (e.g., painting, writing, sculpting)
- Playing games (e.g., board games, video games, sports)
- Scientific research (e.g., theoretical physics)
- Other academic research (e.g., history, philosophy)
- Participating in cultural and religious traditions
- Listening to music
- Learning a new recipe
- Exercise
- Eating an excellent meal
- Watching TV
- Philanthropy
- Caring for friends and family

Are there some other important examples worth considering?

The Alvy Singer Problem

Suppose that the Afterlife Conjecture is true. Why then don't we respond to *our actual situation* with ennui (like Woody Allen's Alvy Singer), given that we are justified in being extremely confident that humanity will, eventually, go extinct?

1. Might the difference in timing matter? If so, why?
2. Does this show that the Afterlife Conjecture is, actually, not true?
3. Is the difference in our responses *rational*? If not, which response should we revise?

Reasons to Worry about Future Generations

In addition to *beneficence*, Scheffler identifies four other reasons to worry about the existence of future generations:

1. *Reasons of Self-interest.*
2. *Reasons of Love.*
3. *Reasons of Valuation.*
4. *Reasons of Reciprocity.*

Offhand, it is hard to see how we could stand in a relationship of reciprocity with strangers who we know we will never meet and who cannot (given the laws of physics) do anything to causally influence our lives.

What does Scheffler mean then? In what sense is there *reciprocity* between generations? Do you think his view is plausible?