

Death and the Meaning of Life

A Critical Study of Metz's *Meaning in Life*

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Abstract

In *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*, Thaddeus Metz advocates a kind of naturalistic objective theory of meaning in life, through a rejection of supernaturalism. In this paper, I examine Metz's argument on supernaturalism, in particular, soul-centered theory and immortality. I will argue that his objection to supernaturalism is inadequate because he does not treat properly a familiar idea about the relationship between *death* and meaning, namely, the idea that a person's death itself makes her life *meaningless*. Metz interprets immortality as a condition for *obtaining meaning*, but in view of the idea that I present, immortality means the *negation of the death* of a person whose life *already has meaning*. As I see it, this idea about death and meaning is also one of the motivations to accept a soul-centered theory and therefore key to a fuller rejection of supernaturalism.

1. Introduction

In *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*, Thaddeus Metz advocates a kind of naturalistic objective theory of meaning in life on the basis of a comprehensive survey of existing literature about this topic in analytic philosophy. In this paper, I focus on his argument in Part II of his book on supernaturalism, in particular, the argument in Chapter 7 on soul-centered theory and immortality. I will argue that Metz does not treat properly a familiar idea about the relationship between *death* and meaning, namely, the idea that a person's death itself makes her life *meaningless*. Metz interprets immortality as a condition for *obtaining meaning*, but in view of the idea that I present, immortality means the *negation of the death* of a person whose life *already has meaning*. As I see it, this idea about death and meaning is also one of the motivations to accept a soul-centered theory and therefore key to a fuller rejection of supernaturalism. Besides this, my argument involves some general metaphysical remarks about life's meaning.

The argument goes as follows. In Section 2, I summarize the metaphysical devices concerning the relationship between meaning and *person*, rather than

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life. By using these devices, in Section 3 and 4, I examine Metz’s argument on soul-centered theory and immortality. Although Metz interprets immortality as a condition for *meaningfulness*, I argue that immortality can be taken as the *negation of the death* of a person whose life *already has meaning*. In Section 5, I conclude by adding a few suggestions about the alleged importance of “traces” of life, which Metz takes up peripherally.

2. A Metaphysics of Meaningfulness

I introduce here a somewhat formal and metaphysical way of talking about meaningfulness in order to make clear my main argument in the sections below. One of the aims of the question of meaning in life can be stated generally as follows: to specify the *properties* that make a person’s life meaningful when she has them, whether they are intrinsic or relational, physical or non-physical, natural or supernatural. Examples of such properties may include *being such that her family members live long and happily, finding a cure for a certain intractable disease, making a contribution to the liberation of non-human animals*, and so on. According to Metz’s own “fundamentality theory,” the (general) property that makes a person’s life meaningful would be (*sufficiently*) “*employ[ing] her reason and in ways that positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence.*”¹ By contrast, according to subjectivism, which Metz rejects, the (general) property might be “*obtain[ing] the objects of her (or her group’s) propositional attitudes*” in terms of *meaningfulness* (p. 220).

It is important to emphasize that the subject of these properties is *person*, not *life*. Of course, it is trivially true that the property of “meaningfulness” is a property of *life*, as Metz maintains that life is the bearer of meaningfulness (3.2 and 1.2). Indeed, we use phrases like “a meaningful *life*,” “her *life* has meaning,” “her *life* is meaningful,” and so on. However, I focus on the properties of the person, which make her life meaningful, because my interest in this paper is in the relationship between death and meaning.² What dies is the person, not the

¹ This is from (FT₁), which he formulates as the most basic statement of his view (Metz 2013, p. 222). Hereafter, where reference to Metz’s book is made, I only mention the page or section number.

² This is also a reason why I clarify the metaphysics of meaningfulness in detail in this section. As Metz focuses on the notion of life, not person, it is important for the sake of clear argument to distinguish between the devices that Metz uses and those that I use. Additionally, in this paper, I argue only about a person’s life, for the sake of simplicity. It seems that there is no good reason to exclude

life (instead, the life ends, in that it has a terminal point).

We can call the kind of property at issue a “meaning-making property” in an analogy with welfare: on the simple form of hedonism, for example, pleasantness is a good-making property (painfulness is a bad-making property). A person’s having good-making properties makes her well off or promotes her welfare.³

There are two important additional elements concerning how a person has meaning-making properties: time and degree. First, let us see about time. Metz distinguishes two senses of “life.” One is “whole-life” and the other is “part-life” (pp. 38–9). He argues that both of them can be the bearer of meaning (3.3–3.5). My focus is on the relationship between the time when a *person* has a certain meaning-making property and the time when her life is meaningful by virtue of her having that property. As I see it, there are various relationships between these times. For example, a person may have, at a certain time, the property of *achieving her great goal for which she sacrificed her life*, but the obtaining of it appears to make not only her part-life of that time meaningful. It seems natural to think that it makes her whole-life meaningful. Perhaps getting some meaning-making property at a certain time makes the period of her life after the time of getting it, or a certain period before the time of getting it, meaningful retroactively. While the clarification of the general condition of the relationships at issue is worth undertaking, here I treat them on a case-by-case basis and do not pursue the clarification further.

Second, meaning may come in degrees. Metz maintains that a life can be both *pro tanto* (that is, to some extent) meaningful, or, on balance, meaningful (pp. 39–40). This distinction appears to make sense in terms of both part-life and whole-life. It seems plausible to think that we can do both *pro tanto* meaningful things and *pro tanto* meaningless things at the same certain time or period (for example, a Sunday) and that we can evaluate whether these parts of life are, on

the possibility that (at least some intelligent) non-human animals have meaningful lives.

³ There is at least one interesting difference. The bearer of both welfare and good-making properties is basically thought to be the person, but there is another category of the “intrinsic value for a person” whose bearer is standardly thought to be states of affairs. A person’s welfare is determined by the intrinsic value for her of each state of affairs, that she has certain good-making properties. Besides, each whole- and part-life can be thought of as a complex composition of states of affairs. Then, using the notion of a state of affairs would enable a unified treatment of both a whole- and part-life. See, for example, Bradley (2009), esp. pp. 4–8. The same might be said about meaningfulness, but Metz seems not to be concerned in his book about what life itself is, whether it is whole or part.

balance, meaningful.⁴ I will focus only on a meaning-making property that makes life, on balance, meaningful and hereafter represent it as “*P*,” because this *P* is relevant to my interest in this paper about *meaninglessness*, which in turn is important to the issue of death. If *P* is an on-balance meaning-making property, the lack of any *P* represents, on balance, the meaninglessness of one’s life. On the other hand, if *P* is *pro tanto*, the lack of any *P* can mean a *pro tanto* meaningless but still *pro tanto* meaningful life. The former but not latter kind of meaninglessness seems the object of our concern when we wonder whether our lives are meaningless or not.

Now, let us turn to how a life does *lack* meaning, that is, how a life is *meaningless*. This topic relates to Metz’s arguments about “anti-matter,” which is a negative factor of meaning (pp. 63–4). Without this negative factor, we can simply think in this way: When *S* lacks any *P*, *S*’s life is (on balance) meaningless. However, in the context of showing similarity (and dissimilarity) between pleasure and meaning (Chapter 4), Metz claims that meaning is not monopolar but bipolar, that is, meaning has both positive and negative scales. Our language seems to suggest that, as he admits (p. 64), meaning has only a monopolar dimension. However, Metz argues that while “blowing up the Sphinx for fun” appears to be much worse in terms of meaning than “oversleeping,” both would be represented with the same zero level of meaningfulness if meaning had only a positive dimension. If he is right, *blowing up the Sphinx for fun* is an example of, so to say, anti-meaning-making properties (hereafter “*P^A*”).

I am not convinced that life can have negative meaning. First, intuition on Metz’s example may differ. Some might intuit that actions like blowing up the Sphinx for fun are just a waste of time and just have no value (cf. Kauppinen 2015, p. 604). At least, our evaluations will depend on the further detailed description. Besides, there seem to be some clear differences between “blowing up the Sphinx for fun” and “oversleeping,” other than meaning. The former is an action that destroys a thing with salient external values (e.g., aesthetic and historical values) and such an action is perhaps even morally wrong. Although most of us think that such actions have an important difference in value, it does not seem clear that the difference, which our intuition tells us about the situation, is about meaningfulness. Second, actions (or more generally, events) can *make worse* one’s life without a negative scale. All these actions need is to be making

⁴ I suspect that Metz thinks that the notion of “on balance” meaningfulness applies only to whole-life.

a difference *comparatively*. It seems plausible to take into account a counterfactual element when we evaluate actions: a comparative evaluation between the value of the actual situation where one does an action and the counterfactual situation where the action and the consequences of it do not hold. Mere oversleeping seems not to make so much of a difference, but blowing up the Sphinx seems to make a great difference, because, for example, a person who can do such an aggressive thing could have done much more meaningful actions otherwise.⁵ Such a person wastes her time and ability by doing the thing with no meaning.

I have a doubt about the concept of anti-matter, but the remark I have just stated is not sufficient to counter it. Therefore, I will examine not only the monopolar view but also the bipolar view. Under the monopolar view, person S's life is meaningless when S does not have any *P*. Under the bipolar view, which admits anti-matter, S's life is meaningless when S has some P^A (I presuppose that some cases of having a certain P^A are represented with the zero level of meaning). I also assume that P^A is an on-balance anti-meaning-making property, just the same as *P*. In the next section, by using these metaphysical devices, I will start to examine Metz's argument against the supernaturalism of meaning in life.

3. Metz on Soul and Immortality

In Chapter 7 of his book (especially, 7.3 and 7.4), Metz examines soul-centered theory, "the view that a significant existence is nothing but being constituted by a soul that lives forever in a certain way, where a soul is an indestructible, spiritual substance" (p. 123). The point of the criticism I will propose against Metz's argument can be stated in several different ways. First, the idea of immortality should not necessarily be taken to be a supernatural one. I do not mean, however, a physical (or at least non-supernatural) eternal life like that of a vampire. Nor do I mean a modal status, such as being unable to die (cf. pp. 123–4).⁶ I will argue that there is another simple idea: immortality means

⁵ I do not mean here that we should admit the notion of "external meaning" as a distinct category, according to which a *mere* fact of an event's being counterfactually better in respect of meaning makes the event meaningful. See Smuts (2013), pp. 553–6 as a criticism of this notion.

⁶ I also do not mean the view, which Metz mentions negatively, that the reason why we crave our own immortality or long-term consequences is explained by our capacity to conceive of ever better states and our tendency to wish to achieve these (pp. 247–8).

the *negation of death*, especially in the context of what I want to call Tolstoian nihilism, the view that a person's death itself makes her life meaningless. To put my point another way, according to Metz, soul-centered theorists think that immortality is important because an eternal soul has unusual great value. I point out, however, that there is at least one understanding of immortality in which the amount of value is not important: immortality can mean simply retaining the existence of things with their usual earthly value.

The idea that immortality means the negation of death seems not controversial in itself. Metz may of course realize this, and he may just be limiting his argument to the relationship between the supernatural soul and meaning. However, I argue that once we see the concept of immortality as the negation of death, the point of the standard rationales for soul-centered theory can be fully understood. Finally, I attempt to agree with Metz that supernaturalism is wrong, but I think that a close examination of the idea that I focus on is key for a fuller rejection of supernaturalism.

I will now begin to examine Metz's argument against soul-centered theory. According to Metz, there are three traditional rationales for soul-centered theory. (a) *Realizing justice* (7.4.1): "[L]ife would be meaningless if the injustices of this world were not rectified in another world" (p. 124). Or, as Kant claims, a person's moral perfection with happiness requires her own immortality (p. 126). (b) *Making a permanent difference* (7.4.2): "[L]ife would be meaningless if nothing were worth pursuing and that nothing would be worth pursuing if it would not have an 'ultimate consequence,'" and "one could apparently make a permanent difference only if one's life did not end with the death of one's body" (p. 128). (c) *Transcending limits* (7.4.3): "[T]he meaning of something in general appears to be a matter of asking about its relationship with other things [...]. A life is meaningful, then, insofar as it relates to something beyond it in the right way" (p. 130). In addition, immortality would be an instance of transcending one's own temporal limit (p. 131).

Metz argues that although all rationales might require an afterlife, each of them does not require an *eternal* life. As I see it, his basic argument can be understood by using the concept of meaning-making property *P*: in order for person *S* to get some *P* at a certain time *t*, it is necessary to exist at *t* but not necessary to persist after *t*. Therefore, it is not necessary for *S* to persist *eternally*. Metz's explanation about each rationale and argument against it can be understood as follows: (a) *P* for realizing justice includes *being compensated for*

the losses in one's lifetime, being punished for wrongness and vice, being rewarded for rightness and virtue, or being morally perfect. Incidentally, all these *Ps* appear to make one's whole-life meaningful (it is possible that the same thing can be said about *Ps* for other rationales, which we will see below). Metz maintains that we can get these properties in finite time, even if we eventually come to an end (pp. 124–7). In particular, a limited (afterlife) time is sufficient to get the reward of a limited living time. Or, with regard to moral perfection, “We seem able to conceive of a morally ideal agent who *eventually dies*” (p. 126, emphasis mine). This remark means that *S*'s persistence after getting *P* is not required to get *P*.⁷ (b) According to Metz, as I understand him, *P* for making a permanent difference can be thought of as *making a permanent difference on infinite things other than S* (p. 129). *Once S* has gotten this *P*, *S*'s own persistence is not needed. Therefore, *S* can get some *P* without *S*'s own eternal life. (c) *P* for transcending limits is understood as *crossing S's boundary, or being connected with an external value*. According to Metz, certain valuable things that can be realized in *S*'s lifetime, such as loving others or creating a work of art, seem sufficient to transcend limits. Thus, transcendence of *S*'s own temporal limits is not needed (pp. 130–1).

Metz's argument seems simple and convincing. There appears to be no good reason to think that we humans cannot get those *Ps* mentioned above in our limited time. In order to get *Ps*, we do not need persistence after getting them, or, needless to say, eternity. Therefore, these three rationales would fail to support soul-centered theory (at least in its standard forms).

Here, it is worthwhile to give an overview of Metz's argument in Part II of his book on the supernaturalism of meaning in life. Metz's strategy against supernaturalism is to show that any promising argument for supernaturalism is based on the *perfection thesis*, “the claim that *meaning in one's life requires engaging with a maximally conceivable value*” (p. 138, emphasis original), and then to reject this thesis. In more detail, in Chapter 7 of his book (7.1–7.2), he maintains that the most defensible God-centered view is the idea that “the more we respect, love, and commune with a (non-purposive) being with the qualitative properties,” by which he means atemporality, immutability, simplicity, and infinitude, “and the more it does so with us, the more meaningful our lives” (p. 122, see also p. 110). He claims that a perfect being with the properties has a

⁷ He also rejects the idea that the only way to separate from one's physical self is to become an indestructible soul (pp. 125–6).

“maximally conceivable value.” This concept of value is also key for his argument against soul-centered theory. First, after criticizing the three existing rationales for soul-centered theory (as we have seen), Metz shows that once these rationales are reconstructed so that they support soul-centered theory, these arguments would claim that an immortal soul is required for engaging with a “maximally conceivable value” (7.3–7.6). Metz argues finally that that value is not necessary for meaningfulness, and he rejects the perfection thesis and supernaturalist theories in general (Chapter 8). I avoid examining Metz’s argument against supernaturalism further, but it has been confirmed that Metz’s basic line of thought involves the intimate connection between immortality and a kind of superlative value.

4. Death and Meaninglessness

I agree with Metz that none of the three rationales work well for soul-centered theory, but I think there is an appealing idea in their original form that Metz overlooks.⁸ In particular, the idea can be drawn from a passage in Tolstoy.

Sooner or later there would come diseases and death (they had come already) to my dear ones and to me, and there would be nothing left but stench and worms. All my affairs, no matter what they might be, would sooner or later be forgotten, and I myself should not exist. So why should I worry about all these things?⁹

Metz objects to this remark that “death intuitively cannot undercut the worth of performing certain constructive actions. [...For example,] helping others can be worth doing, even though the helping agent will die and the helping action

⁸ I have already put forward the core idea of this section in Yoshizawa (2011, in Japanese). I focused there mainly on Metz (2003), in which he argues about the “Immortality Requirement” for meaningfulness. In the present paper, I make clearer and develop this idea and argue for it in a rather broader scope, in particular to cover the topics about external valuable things and the arguments that are developed further in Metz (2013).

⁹ Tolstoy (1905), p. 9. I do not attempt to say that Tolstoy indeed realized the idea I point out. Tolstoy may really be, as Metz interprets him (p. 242), a supernaturalist in terms of meaningfulness. However, if my argument in this paper is right, it is possible that Tolstoy himself eventually goes the wrong way about grasping his initial idea concerning death and meaning.

will have no infinite ramifications” (p. 128).¹⁰ Metz continues, “Tolstoy would have a stronger response to [...the criticism] if he could explain why it at first seems as though it is worthwhile for a mortal to help other mortals and why this judgment is false, upon further reflection” (p. 128). He then suggests that “Probably the strongest explanation is that while such activities seem to merit performance from an everyday perspective, from a broader perspective nothing is worth doing unless it will have an *ultimate consequence*” (p. 128, emphasis mine).¹¹ The point is that Metz here thinks that Tolstoy’s remark can be understood as being based on the idea of “ultimate consequence.” Metz then continues to argue (rightly) that even if an “ultimate consequence” is necessary for meaning, an eternal soul is not necessary for it (as seen in the last section). Now, I will show that there is a *seemingly* plausible explanation that does not appeal to the idea of “ultimate consequence.”

This *seemingly* plausible explanation is based on the idea that a person’s death itself makes her life meaningless.¹² To put it more precisely, the idea is that even if a person’s *life is meaningful*, this vanishes with her death (and this *appears* to mean meaninglessness). By contrast, Metz’s interpretation of Tolstoy’s remark is this: a person’s *life is meaningless* if she dies (that is, she is finite) because death is an obstacle for realizing or connecting with superlative infinite value, which is required for meaning. I will continue to amplify this idea.

Two kinds of death are at issue in Tolstoy’s passage above (and in Metz’s criticism of it). One is the death of the subject *S* of meaningfulness (“me”), and the other is the death of the valuable beings that are external to *S* (“my dear ones”), which can be called the “consequences” of *S*’s life.

First, in order to explain the relationship between *S*’s death and the meaningfulness of *S*’s life, we should look at the general condition between *S* and the meaning-making property *P*, which I introduced in Section 2, in more detail. Here, I focus on the kind of *P* such that when a person has *P* at a certain time *t*, her whole-life is meaningful, because Tolstoy’s concern seems to be

¹⁰ Metz refers here to Antony Flew’s remark (Flew 1966, p. 105).

¹¹ Metz refers here, for example, to Oswald Hanfling’s remark (Hanfling 1987, pp. 22–4). See also note 17 below about the relationship between the idea of “ultimate consequence” and “broader perspective,” which Metz suggests here.

¹² I write “seemingly” because I think, ultimately, that the idea that a person’s death itself makes her life meaningless, on which this explanation is based, is dubious, as we will see later, but even a dubious idea can motivate one to claim a certain view (just as a conclusion can be inferred validly even from false presumptions).

about whether his *whole-life* is meaningless and also, as we saw in the last section, the properties at issue with respect to soul-centered theory appears to be this kind of *P*. (I make brief remarks about another type of *P* later.) There is a form in which S's whole-life is meaningful by obtaining some *P* at a certain time *t*:

(1) S has some *P*.

However, there are two forms in which person S's life is *not* meaningful by virtue of lacking *P* at *t*:

(2) S does not have any *P*.

(3) S does not have any *P*, *because there is no such person*.

Form (2) means that S's life is meaningless, while (3) means that S is absent, more precisely, that S has no property at all at *t* because S does not exist at that time. Both of these could be expressed as the "lack" of meaning, in a sense.

Taking the anti-meaning-making property P^A into consideration, the corresponding forms would be as follows:

(1') S has some *P* (and does not have any P^A).

(2') S has some P^A .

(3') S has *neither* any *P* *nor* any P^A , because there is no such person.

The difference between (2') and (3') is clearer with respect to P^A : (3') means that S does not even have any P^A , while (2') means that S has some P^A .

Both (1) and (1') are normal forms of life's being meaningful and are equivalent to the negation of (2) and (2'), respectively. Moreover, S's immortality means the negation of (3) and (3'), not the negation of (2) and (2'), respectively. What should be stressed here is something we can guess from Tolstoy's passage, namely, that Tolstoy's family ("my dear ones") are some of the important beings that contribute to his life's meaning. It is natural to interpret the meaningfulness of Tolstoy's life as being a connection to an earthly and (relatively) *usual* value in this context, rather than as being a connection to a kind of *superlative* value. To put it more plainly, while Metz interprets immortality as an instrument or a condition of meaningfulness, I think of

immortality not as a condition of meaningfulness, but as the negation of a “lack” or “loss” of meaningfulness by death.

A similar line can be used for the deaths of external valuable beings like “the dear ones” (hereafter “D”):

- (1”) D has some value *V*.
- (2”) D does not have any *V*.
- (3”) D does not have any *V*, because D does not exist.

The immortality of D is the denial of (3”). The cases where the valuable external things are not persons but, for example, great artworks or great pieces of literature, may be treated in a similar way (while their annihilations are not said to be “deaths”).

Now, the questions of “why it at first seems as though it is worthwhile for a mortal to help other mortals” and “why this judgment is false, upon further reflection” (p. 128), which are the two parts of the Metz’s objection against Tolstoy, would *seem to be* explained without appealing to the idea of “ultimate consequence.” The answer to the first question, which Metz would also agree with, is this: because human lives have value in themselves and to help such mortals is meaningful in itself. The answer to the second question, which Metz overlooks, is this: because these *valuable* beings D vanished by their deaths, then the relation with D does not hold (because one of the relata does not exist); in turn, the relational property *P*, *being connected properly with D*, is no longer instantiated, and eventually the very subject *S* of *P* vanished by virtue of *S*’s own death. Besides, in Tolstoy’s passage, an attitudinal element of the others (“sooner or later be forgotten”) is also at issue and can be explained along a similar line. What is feared about being forgotten here? Does this fear come from the idea that *staying remembered* has (or is an instrument of) superlative value or the idea that the longer it stays remembered the larger amount of value it brings? Perhaps not. What is feared about being forgotten seems to be an already *valuable* thing. This observation appears to accord with the fact that Tolstoy’s life seems meaningful when he writes this passage. As I see it, it is plausible to think that he undergoes a thought process as follows: He finds that all *valuable* things for him will be “lost” because they will die or disappear. And because of this fact, he feels sorrow and loses his zest for life. Then, he claims that his life is meaningless. In a process like this, one would crave (wrongly, as I

see it) immortality in order to realize a meaningful life.¹³

The idea that a person's death makes her life meaningless can be called "naturalistic nihilism," which I think is involved in Tolstoy's remark, while Metz sees Tolstoy's view as a "supernaturalistic nihilism."¹⁴ I think that this idea about death and meaning is key to fully understanding the rationales of soul-centered theory and therefore key to rejecting them.

5. Existence and the Meaning of Life

A Tolstoian kind of concern about meaning can be related to the well-known idea of the importance of "leav[ing] longstanding 'traces' behind upon our death" (p. 247),¹⁵ and it is *not* necessarily connected to supernatural eternity, as Metz rightly argues, albeit peripherally (13.4). I conclude this paper by making a few remarks about "traces," which are thought to be typical things with external (perhaps objective) value.

One might think from my argument that I maintain that, to seek a long-term continuity of the traces or the subject of meaningfulness misses the point with regard to meaning in life. However, it is certainly an oversimplification to say that existence itself is *the* matter of meaning in life and that continuity is then irrelevant to the question of meaning. Indeed, there are cases in which continuity is important. We should perhaps hurry and not procrastinate in finding truly valuable things and engage with them, simply because we mortals do not have much time. Besides, some events that occur after one's own death or the survival of the others (or humankind as such) can be important as external things (if not necessary) for our personal meaningfulness or other personal values.¹⁶ Nonetheless, I want to emphasize that there is at least one other matter. Our concern about existence and meaning may arise even in a person who is free from the above possible obstacles about continuity to realize a meaningful life.

¹³ It seems easy to see that a similar line can be used in order to explain why we want to transcend our temporal limit. Besides, one aspect of "realizing justice" might be understood in essentially the same way. If death itself is the tragedy of life, only immortality itself is thought to be immune from it (and not compensation for it).

¹⁴ Metz writes that soul-centered theory is compatible with nihilism (p. 124). That is, assuming soul-centered theory, if there is no soul, then nihilism is true. If my argument in this paper is right, however, the story seems the other way round: Naturalistic nihilism comes first, and the craving (wrongly, as I see it) for supernatural valuable things follows.

¹⁵ Metz ascribes this expression of "traces" to Robert Nozick (1981, esp. p. 582).

¹⁶ For example, recall Samuel Scheffler's unorthodox notion of "the collective afterlife," which is contrasted with "the personal afterlife" (Scheffler 2013, esp. pp. 15–6, 64).

The concern is over the disappearance of our lives in the end, whether they are meaningful or not.¹⁷

However, I do not attempt to claim here that the idea that a person's death itself makes her life meaningless is true. I do not think that death really makes life meaningless, because it is dubious that (3) (and (3')) implies meaninglessness. It is different from (2) (and (2')), which surely do imply meaninglessness. On the one hand, when (2) is realized, S's meaningful state come to an end and S is in a meaningless state; on the other hand, when (3) is realized, S is in *neither* a meaningful state *nor* a meaningless state.¹⁸

Furthermore, especially in cases where the *P* at issue is the kind of property such that the time of obtaining *P* corresponds to the time of life's having meaning, even though we may refer to (3) (and (3')) as "meaninglessness," this may not matter with respect to meaning. After one's death, what matters appears to be whether the life *was* meaningful, not whether it *is* meaningful, as Metz argues about whether or not "Hitler's life *was* meaningful" (pp. 5, 26, emphasis mine), "Gauguin's life *was* meaningful" (p. 191, emphasis mine), and "Mandela's life *was* meaningful" (p. 228, emphasis mine).¹⁹ In addition, a person may be able to have some *P* after her death (for example, *being admired on the occasion of the eventual completion of the Sagrada Familia*); if so, her life would become meaningful posthumously (cf. p. 70).

My point is, however, that even if the idea that a person's death itself makes

¹⁷ This sort of concern is often related to the idea of meaninglessness from the point of view of the universe (13.3). But the nothingness of death can be captured by a much more narrow perspective. So I think that the scale or the depth of objectivity is irrelevant, or at least there is another point. The point is existence (of valuable being) itself.

¹⁸ In some cases, S's death could make her life meaningless. With respect to the kind of *P* that makes S's whole-life meaningful, there are two ways in which S's life is meaningless: one is that S never gets *P* and the other is that she loses *P* that she had once possessed. It is possible to say, in a sense, that S's death could make her life meaningless in the former way, when S's life ends before S gets *P* (in other words, during S's lifetime, (2) is true at all times). However, that there could be some such cases does not mean that death *generally* makes all people's lives meaningless. What I want to elicit as Tolstoian nihilism is the *general* claim that S "loses" *P* by her death in the latter way, that is, the claim that (3) means S's lack of *P* (while I finally claim that (3) does not mean meaninglessness). It is worth emphasizing here that this clarification of the point of Tolstoian nihilism is based on the distinction between (2) and (3) and, in turn, on the materials of the metaphysics of person and its properties, not life and its properties, which I introduced in Section 2.

¹⁹ One might think that it is better to express Tolstoian nihilism as the idea that the life was meaningful until (or more properly, only before) it ended. An anonymous reviewer makes this line of suggestion. I think that, however, by making the idea a little clearer, it turns out to be either not different from mine, or else problematic. If the idea is that the life was meaningful until it ended *and it is meaningless after death*, the point is nothing but what I want to bring up. If the idea is that the life's past meaningfulness makes the life "meaningless" on her death, the idea seems not to make sense.

her life meaningless is dubious, it is deep and familiar. A parallel idea is one of the main topics in the arguments about the *evil of death*. A branch of Epicureanism maintains that death is *neither bad nor good* for the one who dies, because after S's death, S no longer exists, and relations between events and S, such as "is bad (good) for" or even "was bad (good) for," do not hold.²⁰ Furthermore, sometimes the nothingness of death itself is said to be fearful. According to Aristotle, "[D]eath is the most terrible of all things; for it is the end, and *nothing is thought to be any longer either good or bad for the dead*" (*Nicomachean Ethics* III, 1115a, emphasis mine). On the other hand, sometimes the nothingness of death (Frances Kamm calls it "the Extinction Factor" of death) is even said to be *bad*.²¹ So, we should take the idea seriously. (A line of argument against it would be based on the distinction between (2) and (3), as previously noted.)

I attempt to agree with Metz that naturalistic objectivism is on the right track as a theory of meaningfulness (and indeed it is now the most common sort of view), but I am not satisfied with his treatment of the relationship between (non)existence and meaning. As I stated above, our concern about existence and meaning is deep. On the other hand, I suspect that we know well what is valuable in our own life (while we sometimes lose sight of them in a lot of unimportant things). So, I am optimistic, in a sense, that the answers to the question of meaning will be revealed to be not so demanding, once we have got rid of the "metaphysical" concern about existence and meaning. When we

²⁰ See, as criticism of this view, Bradley (2009), pp. 81–3. This view is often thought to be based on the metaphysical framework of *presentism*, according to which only present things exist and those that have ceased to exist (relative to time) literally do not exist at all. Peter Singer replies to the Tolstoian concern about meaninglessness (and morality) as follows, appealing to the metaphysical framework of four-dimensionalism (more precisely, *eternalism*): "If we regard time as a fourth dimension, then we can think of the universe, throughout all the times at which it contains sentient life, as a four-dimensional entity. We can then make that four-dimensional world a better place by causing there to be less pointless suffering in one particular place, at one particular time, than there would otherwise have been" (Singer 1997, p. 274). Singer's aim here can be understood as showing that our "consequences" do not cease to exist *in a sense* even when they disappear (relative to time). The point is that being placed somewhere in four-dimensional space-time does not mean *eternity* or the transcendence of temporality. In other words, the point is not eternity but existence itself. I think that Singer's remark certainly captures the point of one of the concerns about meaning, which is essentially related to the concept of existence and time.

²¹ Kamm (1998), pp. 43–4. According to Kamm, the badness consists in "the factor of the possibility being all over of more of a life in the direction in which time moves" (Kamm 1998, p. 43). Theo Van Willigenburg writes, "This threat of complete extinction arouses terror in us and is a major motive for belief in an after-life" (Van Willigenburg 2001, p. 34). He clearly distinguishes this "badness" from the evil of death as the "deprivation" of possible goods (cf. Bradley 2009).

understand (rightly) that the meaning of our life and external values are not threatened even if they do not continue over a very long period of time, we need not be disturbed about our everyday, “tiny” meaning. I think that dissolving such a concern is one of the most important tasks of philosophers (in particular anti-nihilists such as Metz (and me)) with respect to the question of meaning in life.²²

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²² The manuscript with the earliest version of the core idea of this paper was presented in a seminar at Keio University, Japan, for young analytic metaphysicians. I would like to thank the participants, and especially Takashi Yagisawa, who was invited as the guest commentator. Additionally, I am grateful to Ryo Chonabayashi, Tatsuya Kashiwabata, Naoaki Kitamura, Tatsuya Murayama, Kazunobu Narita, Taku Tanikawa and Kuniaki Tawara for their helpful comments and discussions, and also to the anonymous reviewer for the suggestions and comments.

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