

## Permanent Value\*

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**Abstract:** Temporal nihilism is the view that our lives won't matter after we die. According to the standard interpretation, this is because our lives won't make a permanent difference. Many who consider the view thus reject it by denying that our lives need to have an eternal impact. However, in this paper, I develop a different formulation of temporal nihilism revolving around the persistence of personal value itself. According to this stronger version, we do not have personal value after death, so our past life no longer has wellbeing after we die. The standard objections to the standard interpretation don't apply to this more nihilistic nihilism. I offer a new response according to which personal value persists after death because the person continues to exist.

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The concern that our life doesn't matter has many strands. In this paper, I consider just one: Does our life have value for us after we die? According to **temporal nihilism**, the answer is: No. There is no *permanent* personal significance of what we do while alive. After death, it will be, for us, as if we had never lived at all.

Temporal nihilism is different from other strands of nihilism. It's not the concern, discussed by Thomas Nagel (1979: 12), that we humans are unimportant in the grand scheme of things. Even if we were cosmically important while alive, the temporal nihilist denies that our life will be important *for us* after death. Temporal nihilism is also not the concern, discussed by Robert Nozick (1981: 587-588), with whether our lives have a higher 'plan' or 'purpose'. Even if there were, the temporal nihilist denies that fulfilling such plans while alive continues to matter *for us* after death. Temporal nihilism is also not concerned with whether there is 'meaning in life' in the form a special sort of prudential good, as discussed by Susan Wolf (2010; 1997), Thaddeus Metz (2013b: chs. 8 & 12), John Kekes

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(2000), David Wiggins (1976), and Richard Taylor (1970: ch. 18). Even if we acquired such meaning while alive, the temporal nihilist thinks it vanishes upon death.

According to the standard interpretation, temporal nihilism is the view that our lives don't permanently matter because they don't make a permanent impact upon the world. The standard response is that something can be valuable without needing to make a permanent difference. While this may be so, it doesn't undermine the strongest version of temporal nihilism, which holds that personal value *itself* is not permanent. After death, nothing is valuable for us – permanent difference or not. In this paper, I argue against this form of temporal nihilism. Things can be valuable for us even when we're dead, because we still exist after death.

In Section 1, I discuss the standard interpretation of temporal nihilism. In Section 2, I suggest that relationalism about personal value offers resources to develop a stronger version. In Section 3, I use these resources to formulate an argument for this stronger version. In Section 4, I discuss how we can reject this form of temporal nihilism if we hold that that personal value can permanently persist after death. In Section 5, I argue that personal value can in fact permanently persist after death. In Section 6, I canvass several conceptions of the subject of wellbeing that purport to underwrite this permanence, and I tentatively suggest that we should hold that people exist after death as abstract objects.

As a terminological note, at issue in this paper is *personal* value, so all references to 'value' pick out value for someone. And for stylistic variation, I interchange talk of the value of someone's 'life' – where this means the value of someone's life for *them* – with talk of that person's 'wellbeing', whereby I mean their *lifetime* wellbeing.

## 1. Temporal Argument for Nihilism

The standard conception of temporal nihilism takes it to be the concern that all we do while alive will eventually turn to ash and dust. As Thomas Nagel puts the worry, "It is often remarked that nothing we do now will matter in a million years" (1979: 11). Robert Nozick portrays concern as "it shouldn't *ever* be as if you had never existed at all...A significant life is, in some sense, permanent; it makes a permanent difference to the world" (1981: 582). And Tolstoy confesses his own fears:

Is there any meaning in my life which will not be annihilated by the inevitable death that awaits me?...Today or tomorrow sickness and death will come...and nothing will remain other than the stench and the worms. Sooner or later my deeds, whatever they may have been, will be forgotten and will no longer exist. (1987: ch. 4)

On this conception, temporal nihilism is the view that our life doesn't matter because at some point it will no longer have any effect on the world.

Meghan Sullivan formulates this in terms of the **Permanence Principle**:

*Permanence Principle*: The meaningfulness of an activity at a time depends upon it making a permanent difference in the world. (2018: 169)

Sullivan uses the Permanence Principle to construct the **Temporal Argument**:

- 1) Permanence Principle: The meaningfulness of an activity at a time depends upon it making a permanent difference in the world.
- 2) Nothing we can do will make a permanent difference in the world.
- 3) Therefore, nothing we can do has meaning now.

Given the eventual heat death of the universe, Premise 2 seems fairly secure. So to reject this argument we need to reject Premise 1 by rejecting the Permanence Principle.

There are good reasons to do so. Sullivan rejects it because she holds that something can have meaning due to relations to what happened in the past (2018: 180). Nagel denies it by denying that mattering now depends on mattering later (1979: 11). And Nozick doubts that permanence in itself can endow something with value (1981: 585). The lesson is that something can have personal value at a certain time without having eternal effects.

While this is true, the Permanence Principle does not capture the most forceful strand of temporal nihilism. Look again at Tolstoy's confession. He certainly expresses something like the Permanence Principle when he laments that all his deeds will "be forgotten and will no longer exist". But he also hints at a different concern when he asks, "Is there any meaning in my life which will not be annihilated by the inevitable death that awaits me?". Tolstoy seems to think that his life has meaning *while* he's alive but *won't* after death. This suggests a different conception of temporal nihilism.

## 2. Persisting Value

The strongest version of temporal nihilism is the view that personal value does not persist after death. In order to understand what this means, we need to get clear on what it means for value to persist. That's the task of this section. In the next, I show how to use the persistence of value to formulate an argument for this stronger version. From here on, let 'temporal nihilism' pick out this conception.

In taking personal value to persist, temporal nihilists take personal value to be a relation not just to persons but also to times. In this respect, they are in good company. Consider **relationalist** views about wellbeing. These hold that the value of something can change over time due to relations across time (McMahan 2002: ch. 2 sec. 6; Dorsey 2013; 2018). This is *not* the view that 'shape of a life' matters (for this view, see Slote 1982; Kamm 2003: 222-223; Glasgow 2013). Rather, it holds that the

value of something that obtains at a certain time can depend on what goes on at other times, and hence can differ across time.

As an example, take a modification of a case due to Jeff McMahan:

*Surgeon*: A brilliant but desperately poor student, *Studey*, toils to put themselves through medical school. These are years of unremitting hardship and spartan ascetism. At the end, they

*Option A*: go on to a successful career in medicine

*Option B*: have a nervous breakdown and flunk out.

McMahan's original case involves the medical student dying, but the point about retroactive changes is not specific to death, so I've modified the case accordingly.

*Option A* appears to retroactively change the personal value of Studey's past life for the better in that it 'redeems' their years of toil. *Option B* appears to make those years even worse, because it makes them pointless. On either option, even though the toil is in the past, it's value for Studey changes. Thus, because it depends on relations between things across time, personal value can vary across time, which means that personal value is relative to persons at times.

Given relationalism – or any other view that aggregates momentary into overall wellbeing over time (Frugé manuscript) – we must distinguish between the time the valuable thing attains from the times that it is valuable for someone. And we must also distinguish **acquiring** value from **retaining** value. *Acquiring* value occurs when someone *first accrues* value at some time  $t$  from something that attains at some time  $t^*$ . *Retaining* value occurs whenever the value of something *persists* over time. Value can be accrued at time  $t$  but persist through time  $t'$ , or not persist by time  $t^*$ . Given a relationalist view, value can be retained to varying degrees and valences – and might not even be retained at all.

To get a feel for value retention, take an analogy with money. Consider that dollar bills are the 'substrates' of monetary value, where monetary value as such is distinct from the physical dollar bill that 'bears' it. We can imagine that someone deposits money into their lifetime savings by inserting bills into an ATM, and that their lifetime savings is the pure monetary value they have – their total buying and spending power as of some time. After putting the bills into the machine, this person loses them, but they retain the bills' monetary value in the sense that their savings has increased and stays at that new amount for some period of time afterward. If they check on their account a month later, then, unless they've spent some of it or deposited anything else, the amount will be the same, even though the bills are long gone. This person's *lifetime* savings, then, is the total monetary value they have *retained* from the bills deposited into the ATM. But they don't necessarily *retain* this value forever. If they spend some of their savings, or if there is inflation, or if the bank goes defunct, then they have less – perhaps *no* – lifetime savings.

Similar to how lifetime savings requires *saving* monetary value and not merely *depositing* it, overall wellbeing as of a certain time is how much value someone has *retained* as of that time, not merely *acquired*. And similar to how someone can retain the monetary value of the bills as non-monetary substrates, a person can retain the personal value of non-normative substrates after these substrates are gone. Thus, a person doesn't retain fleeting pleasures or pains, satisfied or thwarted desires, or the particular event of achieving a goal. Those are gone as soon as the moments in which they occur have passed. However, a person can *retain the value* of these substrates. Indeed, in order for the person to have overall wellbeing as of a certain time and not merely a sequence of states of momentary wellbeing, then the person must have retained, as of that time, the *personal value itself* of some of the substrates from which they acquired value in the past. Much like how a person can have lifetime savings even once the bills used to deposit monetary value are gone, a person can retain personal value and thus have overall wellbeing even after the non-normative substrates are gone.

The strongest form of temporal nihilism, then, holds that all personal value for someone must occur at some time or other – wellbeing is always relative to a time. And this version of temporal nihilism also upholds relationalism, which allows value to be increased or reduced as well as *completely lost*. This more nihilistic nihilism holds that personal value is related to the person such that relative to times after death they don't possess any value from anything – including from what happened during their past life.

I'm inclined to endorse relationalism, and I'm even more inclined to hold that all personal value must occur at some time or other. Thus, I grant the temporal nihilist both assumptions. There is another way of rejecting their view – but, before getting to that, we need to lay it out more carefully.

### **3. Impermanent Value Argument**

Given relationalism about value, temporal nihilism is a natural position to hold. Relationalism makes value difficult to retain, even while alive. Value must be sustained by connections of the right sort over time, and those connections are fragile and always in flux. Thus, the temporal nihilist has the resources to claim that personal value does not persist after death, because, quite generally, things can easily lose their value for someone over time.

Relationalism leads to what we can call the *worldly fragility* of personal value. Consider the *Surgeon* case again. Studey is pursuing their project of becoming a surgeon, but the success or failure of these sort of important projects is highly sensitive to events that occur across time. Some events would lead to Studey having an amazing career in surgery. Others to being a surgeon in distressing circumstances. Still others would make Studey become a family practitioner instead, or even leave the medical field entirely. While such intense projects make worldly fragility salient, the point is not confined to them. Assuming that our wellbeing hooks up to our cares and concerns that reach outside us, then personal value will be sensitive to how well the world cooperates – and the world can cooperate differently at different times.

In addition, relationalism leads to the *attitudinal fragility* of personal value. This is the fragility due to the changes in a person's valuing attitudes. Consider the following scenario – copped with some changes from Richard Brandt (1979: 249):

*Rollercoaster.* When Rodey is five they form a goal to ride a rollercoaster on their fiftieth birthday. By the time Rodey is fifty, they no longer have any intrinsic desire to ride a coaster, but they stumble upon a diary entry from their younger self about their goal to ride one. Out of a mild desire to appease their younger self, the older Rodey rides a coaster. But by the time they are seventy, they have completely forgotten about these earlier desires and have lost any interest to ride one.

Brandt uses this sort of case to argue that we should pay no attention to our past desires – and, presumably, would also say the same for past projects. Dale Dorsey (2013: 162) rejects this verdict and holds that one can benefit one's past self by satisfying this desire. Dorsey is right, it seems to me, that Brandt's claim is too strong. But the temporal nihilist can accept Dorsey's claim that someone can benefit their *past* self – in the sense of giving them something that is good for them relative to *that* time in the past – while denying that it has value for their current self relative to *that* time in the present.

In the Rollercoaster case, it seems that when Rodey is a quinquagenarian riding the coaster is mildly good for them, but by the time they are a septuagenarian it's completely neutral for them. From the perspective of their lifetime wellbeing at the age of seventy, it might as well be that they had never ridden the coaster at all. Thus, it seems that something that once had personal value for someone can lose that value over time due to changing attitudes. A person may shift their goals or cares and concerns, so that what they treated as good for them may become bad or neutral, and what they once treated as bad for them may become good or neutral. Not only is the world outside our heads constantly in flux, but, many times, our valuing attitudes are in flux as well.

Temporal nihilism naturally develops out of this point about attitudinal fragility. Given the above considerations, it might seem that a necessary condition for retaining personal value at some time is that it supports or thwarts a care or concern held at that time. Thus, the nihilist upholds **Value From Having Attitudes**:

*Value From Having Attitudes:* If a person  $s$  possesses value at time  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at time  $t^*$ , then  $x$  furthers or frustrates some valuing attitude that  $s$  has at  $t$ ,

where the degree and valence of value corresponds to the level of furtherance or frustration of either a positive care or a negative concern. Given relationalism and a connection between personal value and our valuing attitudes, then it's natural to think that whether we have value at some time from something depends on how it fits within our cares and concerns we have at that time.

Yet, insofar as someone can only have an attitude while they are alive, then Value From Having Attitudes entails that we can only have personal value while we are alive. Thus, the temporal nihilist upholds **Alive At That Time**:

*Alive At That Time*: If a person  $s$  possesses value at time  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at a time  $t^*$ , then  $s$  is alive at  $t$ .

Value is fragile, then, because it depends on the person being alive, and, as mortals, our lives are fragile.

In addition to such normative considerations, there are more general metaphysical motivations for Alive At That Time. For one thing, it's entailed by **serious presentism** – the view that if something has a property at a time, then it exists at that time. But a temporal nihilist who endorses Alive At That Time needn't be a serious presentist. They might think that, in many cases, an object can have properties at times it doesn't exist, but that when it comes to wellbeing a subject must exist – say, because personal value needs to be underwritten by the attitudes of the subject. Thus, I think the temporal nihilist as such should focus on more targeted considerations connecting personal value to being alive.

We have seen an argument from attitudinal fragility to Alive At That Time. But Alive At That Time straightforwardly entails the **Impermanence Principle**:

*Impermanence Principle*: If a person is dead at time  $t$ , then no  $x$  that attains at time  $t^*$  is personally valuable for them at  $t$ .

The principle is ultimately motivated by the simple thought that once we're dead, we're no longer around to have any value. There is no 'us' for which anything can be good or bad. Thus, it captures the strand of the nihilistic worry that death annihilates all value from one's life. Relative to times you aren't alive, nothing has value for you – including what happened while you were alive. As of times after death, as far as personal value goes, it's as if you had never existed at all.

Therefore, the best version of temporal nihilism denies the Permanence Principle and, in its place, accepts the Impermanence Principle. Recall, the Permanence Principle says:

*Permanence Principle*: The meaningfulness of an activity at a time depends upon it making a permanent difference in the world. (Sullivan 2018: 169)

Abstracting away from 'meaning' as a particular sort of value, the general claim behind this principle is that something can only have personal value if it makes a permanent impact. In terms of the framework we've developed, this amounts to:

*Permanence Principle About Personal Value:* A person has value at  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at  $t^*$  only if  $x$  makes a permanent difference in the world.

For the reasons Sullivan, Nagel, and Nozick provide, we should reject this principle. Something can come to have value for someone, even without having an eternal impact. However, these reasons have no bite for the temporal nihilist who rejects the Permanence Principle but accepts Alive At That Time and so accepts the Impermanence Principle.

Sullivan's objection to the Permanence Principle is that meaning can come from things in the past. But the temporal nihilist can accept that personal value can depend on what happens in the past. Consider the Surgeon case. The temporal nihilist can agree that in *Option A* while Studey is living it up as a surgeon, they have value due to what happened in the past, but the nihilist claims that Studey doesn't retain that value after death.

Nagel's objection is that something can matter at a certain time without it mattering later. But the temporal nihilist agrees. The problem is precisely that someone's life won't matter for them later! Alive At That Time and the resulting Impermanence Principle allow that something can have value for someone until the time of death. Therefore, the temporal nihilist thinks that things matter for someone while they are alive, but they don't matter after death.

Nozick's objection is that permanence in and of itself doesn't give something value. Again, the temporal nihilist can agree. They can hold that something can come to have personal value despite being fleeting. But they think that *value itself* is fleeting. They hold that the personal value of everything – whether it be finite or eternal – vanishes after death.

We can therefore turn the Impermanence Principle into the **Impermanent Value Argument** for temporal nihilism:

- 1) Alive At That Time: If something is valuable for us at a time, then we are alive at that time.
- 2) Impermanence Principle: Hence, when we are dead, nothing will be valuable for us then.
- 3) Therefore, given that we will die, nothing has permanent value for us, and, more generally, we will not permanently have wellbeing.

Alive At That Time entails the Impermanence Principle, so Premise 1 entails Premise 2. And Premise 2 entails the conclusion. Thus, all the action surrounds Alive At That Time. Given that the standard objections to the standard formulation of temporal nihilism don't touch it, we have to look elsewhere if we want to reject this view.

#### 4. Rejecting the Argument



How can we reject the Impermanence Principle that nothing is personally valuable for us after death? To do so we must reject the condition that entails it:

*Alive At That Time:* If a person  $s$  possesses value at time  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at a time  $t^*$ , then  $s$  is alive at  $t$ .

We should replace Alive At That Time with a weaker condition that only requires someone be alive at some point in the history of the universe in order to have personal value at all later times. Call this **Alive At Some Time:**

*Alive At Some Time:* If a person  $s$  possesses value at time  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at time  $t^*$ , then  $s$  is alive at  $t'$ , where either  $t'$  is  $t$  or  $t'$  is later than  $t$ .

Notice that the condition restricts the relevant times of possession to after the person comes to be alive. If one thinks that a person can have personal value before they first come to be alive, then one can drop this restriction. Doing so might help with theorizing about the procreation asymmetry and the non-identity problem, but I set this topic aside for this paper.

Alive At Some Time doesn't entail the *Impermanence Principle*. Recall, that principle says:

*Impermanence Principle:* If a person is dead at time  $t$ , then no  $x$  that attains at time  $t^*$  can be personally valuable for them at  $t$ .

Given Alive At Some Time – and not Alive At That Time – then being dead does not prevent someone from having personal value at that time. Hence, Alive At Some Time allows for someone to have personal value after they die, including retaining wellbeing from their past life. In fact, it allows them to retain that value for the rest of eternity.

Therefore, in order to reject temporal nihilism we need to replace Alive At That Time with Alive At Some Time – at least in conjunction with a sufficient condition that entails some personal value is permanent. But we shouldn't simply deny Alive At That Time in order to avoid temporal nihilism. That would be intolerably ad hoc. Therefore, we should motivate the weaker condition through independent argumentation, and we should substantiate it with a positive theory of the subject of wellbeing. The remaining two sections take up these tasks in turn.

## 5. Value After Death

I offer two clusters of arguments for Value At Some Time. The first revolves around the normative significance of permanent death, the second revolves around that of temporary death. I

discuss the first collection of arguments in more detail elsewhere (Frugé manuscript), so let me just briefly sketch them before working through the second collection in more detail.

One argument is that *Alive At Some Time* is supported by our attitudes toward the dead. Simply put: we treat the dead as retaining the value of their past life. After someone who lived a terrible life dies, we think it is still a tragedy for them that their life went so poorly. After someone who lived a wonderful life dies, we think it is still fortunate for them that their life went so well. Our attitudes suggest a commitment to something like *Alive At Some Time*. Perhaps we're radically mistaken in this regard, but insofar as our normative attitudes are at least a bit of a guide to normative truth, then they support *Alive At Some Time*.

A second argument is that insofar as there are final posthumous harms and benefits, and harms and benefits accrue value at the time they occur, then a person must be able to accrue personal value at times they're dead. And given that someone can acquire value after death, then they should also be able to retain it. Of course, this isn't a knockdown argument. Some deny that there are final posthumous harms or benefits (Bradley 2011: 61), and others hold that the value is accrued prior to death (Pitcher 1984; Luper 2007). But the straightforward interpretation of the data gives reason to deny *Alive At That Time* and uphold *Alive At Some Time*.

A third argument is that people must retain value after death in order for the harm or benefit of death to really matter all that much. To see this, consider *Deprivationism* (Nagel 1979: ch. 1; Feldman 1991; Bradley 2009), which holds that death harms or benefits the one who dies insofar as it deprives them of goods or bads. But if someone's life only has value so long as they are alive, then this holds of their counterfactual life as well. Thus, someone is deprived of goods and bads at most only during those times that they would have been alive. After that time, when they are actually and also counterfactually dead, both their actual and counterfactual lives have no value whatsoever, and so their death would no longer constitute a deprivation. Next consider *Willhavehadism* (Kamm 2020: ch. 1), which holds that death is bad in proportion to how much lifetime wellbeing someone has by the time they die. But if people don't retain personal value when they die, then at the time of their death their life would have no overall wellbeing whatsoever. Hence, there would be nothing to which the badness of death could be proportional.

The second cluster of arguments revolves around **temporary death**, which is death followed by a return to life. Consider the following case:

*Anima's Temporary Death:* A person, *Anima*, actively pursues a life-long project of saving as many species from going extinct as they can. Unfortunately, due to an accident on an expedition, their nervous system shuts down. Fortunately, within minutes they are put into a cryogenically frozen state of suspended animation, and a thousand years later are thawed and resuscitated. *Anima* is a minor but polarizing celebrity – while alive and while frozen. Both before and after their accident, many people thwart their project by intentionally making species go extinct.

It seems that when people make a species go extinct Anima is harmed, even when they are frozen with a dead nervous system. Yet Anima is not alive at those times. If so, then it seems that Alive At That Time is false.

As with the case of posthumous harm, someone might hold that Anima is harmed prior to dying, but the following consideration puts pressure on that suggestion. After Anima is resuscitated, they continue to be harmed when people undermine their project *then*. And it seems odd to think they are harmed *before* and *after* they're dead but not *while* they're dead, given that the thwarting went on throughout this whole period. And even setting the issue of the timing of harm aside, it seems wrong to think that same thwarting, regardless of when the harm occurs, goes from being bad for Anima before the accident to being neutral for them while they are in suspended animation and back to bad again after they are resuscitated. The most straightforward thing to say is simply that it's bad for Anima at all those times, and, hence, Anima has wellbeing at all those times. If so, we need to uphold Alive At Some Time, not Alive At That Time.

Another worry might be that even though Anima is dead while in suspended animation, they still have the capacity for life. If so, the temporal nihilist might hold that Alive At That Time should be revised to involve this more permissive notion. To respond this worry, we can simply consider cases of *resurrection*, where the person has no capacity for life for a period of time and then comes back to life. What one takes resurrection to amount to depends on one's theory of personal identity. So let me just give cases for the view that the person is a body or brain and the view that a person is a continuous psychological process. The argument should generalize beyond these particular views.

Assume that a person is a body or brain. Their body and brain can be resurrected:

*Bodily Resurrection:* Anima's body is disintegrated and the atoms scatter across the universe. A thousand years later those exact same atoms are put into the exact same arrangement as they were in just before Anima is disintegrated.

Or assume that someone is a continuous stream of causally connected psychological states. Then, their psychology can be resurrected (cf. Parfit 1984: 199-200):

*Psychological Resurrection:* A Teletransporter destroys a person's brain and body, but after a thousand years transmits all their psychological states to a new body on Mars. Anima enters the Teletransporter, and their body and psychology are transmitted, without duplication.

We can combine the two cases as follows:

*Psychological and Bodily Resurrection:* A Recombiner separates all the atoms in someone's body, ending their psychological stream. But a thousand years later, it rearranges those same atoms into the exact same arrangement – reconstituting their body and psychological stream with all the psychological states they had prior to being destroyed. Anima enters the Recombiner.

In each of these cases, Anima is destroyed and reconstituted later. During the intervening thousand years, they have no capacity for life at all.

Say that Anima enters the Recombiner. For the same reasons as before, it seems that Anima is harmed when people destroy a species, even during those times that Anima's particles are scattered. And for the same reasons as before, it seems that Anima retains the value of their past life during those times their atoms are scattered. If so, then Alive At That Time – even on the revised version appealing to the capacity for life – is wrong.

Now say that right before Anima is to be reconstituted the Recombiner breaks, so that Anima is never resurrected. This doesn't seem to make any difference as to whether Anima is harmed when people destroy a species, or to whether Anima retains wellbeing from their past life. If so, then the fact that someone comes back to life is not crucial for retaining value after death. Thus, even given *permanent* death, it seems that a person can have wellbeing during those times they aren't alive. Therefore, we should uphold Alive At Some Time.

The case of Anima's Temporary Death suggests that we retain value at least at *some times* after death. However, this is cold comfort if those times eventually fade away. Thus, in order to reject temporal nihilism, Alive At Some Time, which *allows* but does not *require* permanent personal value, needs to be conjoined with a *sufficient* condition for *permanent* personal value.

To work up to this sufficient condition, let's return to the motivation for temporal nihilism. Recall, the nihilist holds:

*Value From Having Attitudes:* If a person  $s$  possesses value at time  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at a time  $t^*$ , then  $x$  furthers or frustrates some valuing attitude that  $s$  has at  $t$ .

By 'has', the nihilist means *possesses as a mental state*. That's why this condition, as I discussed, entails Alive at That Time:

*Alive At That Time:* If a person  $s$  possesses value at time  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at a time  $t^*$ , then  $s$  is alive at  $t$ .

I agree with the temporal nihilist that personal value flows from the cares and concerns of the person, but their mistake is to think that having personal value at a time requires *actively having* the relevant valuing attitude at that time. Instead, personal value at a time only requires that someone have a valuing attitude that *they have not abandoned* by that time.

I can't hope to give a precise characterization of 'abandoned' here. But what I mean is something like: the person has not pursued another project as a replacement, or forsworn their earlier attitude, or completely lost any interest. Abandoning involves some sort of minimal disavowal, and not simply, say, forgetfulness or distraction. The point is that this minimal sense of 'having' as 'not

having abandoned' goes with what someone 'really' values. Endorsing an attitude and not later forswearing it goes with that attitude reflecting what one's 'genuine' cares and concerns.

This suggests a necessary and sufficient condition on having personal value at a time that turns on 'having' a valuing attitude in this minimal sense. Call this condition **Value From Valuing**:

*Value From Valuing*: A person  $s$  possesses value at time  $t$  from some  $x$  that attains at a time  $t^*$  if and only if  $x$  furthers or frustrates some valuing attitude that  $s$  has at or before  $t$ , and  $s$  has not abandoned this attitude at or before  $t$ ,

where the degree and valence of value corresponds to the level of furtherance or frustration of a positive care or negative concern. In this formulation, I've set aside the complication of abandoning and then taking up an attitude again, but it could easily be fixed by just taking the most recent iteration of the care or concern.

Despite this fix, Value From Valuing – as with all proposed substantive necessary and sufficient conditions of philosophically interesting concepts – is likely prone to counterexamples. But the important point here is just that it's on the right track. We can see this in that it gets the right results about our earlier cases. First, it captures the Rollercoaster case. At fifty, Rodey hasn't completely abandoned their desire to ride the coaster, and that's why it's good for them. But at seventy they no longer endorse this attitude, and that's why it's neutral for them. Second, it captures Anima's Temporary Death case. While frozen, Anima hasn't abandoned their project to prevent species from going extinct, even if they can't *actively* pursue it while frozen.

Moreover, Value From Valuing gets the right result about another temporary death case:

*Sick Toddler*: A toddler, *Toddy*, is so ill that their parents put them in suspended animation until they can be cured. While Toddy is frozen, their parents buy them basketball gear and invest in a college fund. Later, they are successfully revived and healed, and they go on to form the goal of being a college basketball player, eventually achieving this dream. But several years after college Toddy comes to detest everything about basketball and hate that their parents inculcated their basketball dreams while they were helplessly frozen.

It would seem that as of their time in college, Toddy is benefitted by their parents' investment in their basketball gear and college fund. Value From Valuing handles this. As of their time in college, Toddy is engaged in the project of being a collegiate player. It also seems that Toddy is not benefitted by those very same investments while they are in suspended animation. Value From Valuing handles this as well. During the time of their suspended animation, Toddy has not formed the goal of playing basketball in college. Additionally, it seems that in the years after college those investments were bad for Toddy. Value From Valuing captures this too. Toddy comes to hate the basketball life.

Thus, I suggest that something like Value From Valuing is true. This gives us the resources to reject temporal nihilism. Its necessary condition side entails Value at Some Time, given that

pursuing a care or concern at some time requires being alive at that time. Its sufficient condition side entails that value can be *permanent*, so long as a person has formed some cares or concerns and has not abandoned them all before death. In the relevant sense of ‘abandon’, a person doesn’t abandon their cares or concerns at death. No longer having the mental states of valuing attitudes due to death is not forswearing them.

## 6. Wellbeing of the Person

Given that we can have permanent value after death, the question arises as to how we can make sense of this. In particular, we must address what we can call the **problem of the subject**: How can a person have value after death, if they do not exist? In this respect, consider the **Termination Thesis**:

*Termination Thesis*: At times after death, the person does not exist.

The Termination Thesis is widely accepted (Nagel 1979: 1; Sumner 1976: 153; Silverstein 1980: 100; Rosenbaum 1986: 120; Luper 1987: 270). But if we are to avoid the Impermanence Principle by rejecting Alive At That Time, then we must reject this thesis. While Alive At That Time treats the subject of wellbeing as a *living* person, Alive At Some Time treats the subject of wellbeing as an *existing* person, where a person can exist without being alive.

Yet we can’t merely reject the Termination thesis. If we are to have *permanent* personal value, then we must reject the Termination Thesis in a way that makes the subject of wellbeing *permanent*. Therefore, we can’t simply reject it, as Fred Feldman (2000) does, on the basis that a person exists after death as a corpse. Corpses eventually go out of existence. And we can’t simply reject it, as Patrick Stokes (2019) does, by taking a person to be a locus of social practices. Social practices eventually end. And we can’t merely take the subject of wellbeing to be a sequence of events about a person, as Shelly Kagan (1994) does for one dimension of wellbeing. Such sequences of events eventually terminate.

How, then, are we to make sense of *permanent* existence after death? I can’t pretend to offer a definitive answer here, so take what follows in the spirit of philosophical exploration. I sketch several proposals before tentatively suggesting that a person exists after death as an abstract object.

### *Meinongianism*

The traditional form of **Meinongianism** is the view that there are non-existent objects (Priest 2016), where non-existent objects can still have properties. Palle Yourgrau (1987) endorses this general picture and holds, in particular, that dead persons are concrete non-existent objects. While this is not a view on which people *exist* after death, it nevertheless holds that people still *are* even when they’re dead. Given that non-existent objects, on this view, have properties, then this view

could capture permanent personal value by holding that a non-existent dead person can still have properties of personal value.

My only complaint about such a Meinongian view is that, like many, I find it hard to wrap my head around non-existent objects that nevertheless are. However, if you grasp this distinction, then this is a worthwhile view for you to explore.

### *Bare particulars*

Niall Connolly (2011) argues that after death persons are **bare particulars** in the sense that they have no intrinsic qualities but are still able to bear relations (cf. Sider 2006). Connolly suggests that a dead person as bare particular is related to all the former qualities they instantiated while they were alive (2011: 95). Presumably, bare particulars can't go out of existence, because they lack any intrinsic properties to be destroyed. So a dead person as bare particular would exist permanently and is related to the wellbeing they had at earlier times while they were alive.

However, if this is the model of relations, then it won't capture the permanence of personal value. We don't merely want the deceased to bear relations to their *past* wellbeing but to have wellbeing *while they're dead* from their past life. Perhaps, though, Connolly's treatment of relations is optional, and so this approach can hold that bare particulars can have wellbeing after death. But, even so, I have my reservations about the view, because it seems to me that the dead do have some intrinsic properties. Socrates – who I'm pretty sure is dead – continues to have the intrinsic property of *being Socrates*. If so, then the deceased aren't bare particulars.

### *Ersatz personhood*

Taking a cue from the philosophy of modality, another approach would be to find some *ersatz* replacement for the person after death. One option, would be to treat deceased persons as fictional entities, on the model of how Gideon Rosen (1990) suggests that we could treat possible worlds as fictions. On this view, we would have a fictional way of talking about the deceased such that, according to the fiction, it's true that people exist after death. However, I'm inclined to reject this approach, because it would seem to make personal value after death fictional as well. Fictional post-mortem value doesn't undermine temporal nihilism, because we don't literally possess this value. So fictionalism does not avoid the core concern of temporal nihilism.

Another option might be to posit eternal individual essences of persons that exist even after the person themselves dies – as Plantinga (1978) posits necessary individual essences to underwrite modal truths about individuals. Yet, on this view, it's not literally true that a person exists after death. What exists is the property that uniquely individuates them – but no one instantiates that property

after the person dies. But then it's hard to see how a property could have wellbeing, and, even if it did, how it would constitute the *person's* wellbeing.

Certainly, there are other ersatz positions one could propose. But it seems they all would have the same trouble that the replacement person is not the person. And we are concerned with personal value for *that* person.

### *B-Theories*

A different sort of view looks to theories of time. In particular, **B-theories** hold that all points in spacetime co-exist in an atemporal sense, and that objects exist in this same atemporal sense, where they inherit their temporal boundaries by being located at certain points. On this kind of view, a person exists in an atemporal sense, though they are located at points where they are alive. Therefore, it's tenselessly true that a person has a certain level of wellbeing at those locations, and so it's tenselessly true that the person exists with a specific lifetime wellbeing. Permanence via atemporality. While Matthew Silverstein (1980) doesn't explicitly endorse this picture, it seems a natural interpretation of his overall commitments.

I don't have any objections to the B-theory as a theory of time, but I don't think it avoids temporal nihilism. As I argued earlier, the temporal nihilist endorses relationalism, which means that personal value is always located at particular times. But the temporal nihilist could endorse the B-theory and simply think that personal value is not located at times after the person's death, even if the person exists in an atemporal sense. That seems like temporal nihilism enough. The worry is about what happens to the value of our life *after death*, not whether there are permanent truths about what the value of our life is like *before death*.

Perhaps, though, the B-theorist has room to argue that this nihilistic worry rests on a confusion due to underestimating the significance of tenseless truths about temporally located value. But I don't see what that confusion would be.

### *Permanetism*

We've seen some appeals to traditional Meinongianism, modality, and time that don't seem to help. But we can draw on other resources in the vicinity. Consider **permanetism** – the view that always everything is always something (Williamson 2013: 4). At first, this view might seem to remove the temporal contingency of what exists at a time. But if we allow that it can be temporally contingent whether something is concrete or abstract, then a permanetist can hold that everything exists always – it just needn't always be concrete. Similar moves can be made in the modal case



about contingently abstract objects (Linsky & Zalta 1994: sec. 4, 1996; Williamson 2013: ch. 1, sec. 2), though we only need to consider temporal version for our purposes.

Without making a commitment to permanentism, we can help ourselves to this conception of the **temporarily concrete** – entities that are concrete at some times and abstract at others. We can hold that *if* someone comes to be alive, then they exist forever after – they just exist as an abstract person after death. Were persons to be temporarily concrete in this way, then we can make sense permanent value. The person continues to exist after death, as abstract, and thereby they remain the subject of wellbeing.

Therefore, we can avoid temporal nihilism. The nihilist's worry is that after death we won't be 'there' for anything to have value for us. It will be as if we had never existed at all. But if we do exist after death, even abstractly, then it won't be as if we had never existed at all. We will, in fact, continue to exist. Of course, we'll be abstract, so we won't have any thoughts or feelings, but things will still remain valuable for us, because we won't have abandoned all of our cares and concerns. Even though our deeds will become so much ash and dust, we will retain their value forever.

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