<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Journal of Ethics*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Johansson, J. (2015)

The Importance of a Good Ending: Some Reflections on Samuel Scheffler's Death and the Afterlife

Journal of Ethics, 19(2): 185-195

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-015-9197-2>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-254586>

The Importance of a Good Ending:

Some Reflections on Samuel Scheffler's *Death and the Afterlife*

Jens Johansson (Uppsala University)

Abstract. In his recent book, *Death and the Afterlife*, Samuel Scheffler argues that it matters greatly to us that there be other human beings long after our own deaths. In support of this “Afterlife Thesis,” as I call it, he provides a thought experiment—the “doomsday scenario”—in which we learn that, although we ourselves will live a normal life span, thirty days after our death the earth will be completely destroyed. In this paper I question this “doomsday” scenario support for Scheffler’s Afterlife Thesis. In particular, I suggest that Scheffler has underestimated the importance of a good ending.

1 Introduction

In his thoughtful and stimulating book, *Death and the Afterlife* (Scheffler 2013), Samuel Scheffler argues for two main theses. One of these is that immortal life would not be attractive for human beings. In other words, Scheffler joins the club of “Immortality Curmudgeons,” as John Martin Fischer has memorably (and rhetorically) called defenders of that thesis (e.g., in Fischer 2013: 337). While the appealingness—or lack thereof—of immortality has been a hotly debated issue among philosophers during the past few decades (especially since the publication of Williams 1973), the second, and perhaps even more central thesis in Scheffler’s book concerns an issue that has been overwhelmingly neglected in the literature. Scheffler’s second main thesis is that it matters greatly to us—much more than we are aware of—that there be other human beings long after our own deaths. This is

the “afterlife” of Scheffler’s title: not the individual’s continued life after her own death, but the *collective* afterlife—the continued existence of the human race long after she herself has gone of our existence. Although Scheffler’s discussion of immortality is obviously well worthy of serious reflection as well, because his second main thesis—let us call it the “Afterlife Thesis”—has the charm of novelty, I shall focus on it.

In support of the Afterlife Thesis, Scheffler provides a thought experiment—the “doomsday scenario”—in which we learn that there will be no afterlife (in the above sense).¹ More precisely, each of us is invited to imagine that, although he or she will live a normal life span, thirty days after his or her death the earth will be completely destroyed in a collision with a gigantic asteroid. The reaction to this piece of news, Scheffler suggests, would be one of dismay and apathy, and a great deal of our motivation to pursue our various projects would be lost forever. Scheffler also apparently thinks that this kind of reaction would not, generally speaking, be irrational.

This “doomsday scenario” support for Scheffler’s Afterlife Thesis is not irresistible, however. In particular, I want in this paper to suggest that Scheffler has underestimated the importance of giving a project or tradition a *good ending*. Whether or not we should be Immortality Curmudgeons, it seems for this reason questionable to me that we are, or would be, or should be, Domsday Curmudgeons.

2 Scheffler’s Afterlife Conjecture

As I indicated, Scheffler bases his Afterlife Thesis on his claims about how we would react to the doomsday scenario. This is a natural approach: in order to show that something matters

¹ At least I read Scheffler as offering the doomsday scenario as *support* for the Afterlife Thesis. For another interpretation, see section 4 below.

greatly to us, it is helpful to imagine how we would think and feel if we knew that it was missing.

How, then, would a person react to the doomsday scenario? Of course, different people would have different reactions. However, Scheffler thinks “it is safe to say most of us would respond to the doomsday scenario with ... profound dismay” (Scheffler 2013: 21). More specifically (and this is what Scheffler calls his “afterlife conjecture”):

... in such a world, people would lose confidence in many sorts of activities, would cease to see reason to engage in many familiar sorts of pursuits, and would become emotionally detached from many of those activities and pursuits. (Scheffler 2013: 43–44)

At some points, Scheffler’s paints an even darker and more drastic picture of the doomsday scenario. He writes, for instance:

... I find it plausible to suppose that such a world would be a world characterized by widespread apathy, anomie, and despair; by the erosion of social institutions and social solidarity; by the deterioration of the physical environment; and by a pervasive loss of conviction about the value or point of many activities. (Scheffler 2013: 40)

It is easy to suspect that if these suggestions are correct, then this is largely because we care about those who would die prematurely—and, to say the least, mercilessly—at doomsday, especially many of our loved ones. Scheffler points out, however, that this can only be one part of the explanation. In a variant of the doomsday story, the “infertility” story (based upon P. D. James’s novel, *The Children of Men*), we learn that no new children will be born. In

this scenario, although there will be no collective afterlife to speak of, no one will die prematurely. According to Scheffler, we would still regard the infertility scenario as terrible news.

Why, then, would belief in the doomsday scenario (or infertility scenario—but I'll focus on the doomsday scenario) have such radical consequences? Scheffler acknowledges, of course, that some of our basic needs and interests would remain relatively intact: in particular, the avoidance of pain would still matter greatly to us, and so would close relationships. (Indeed, as in many tragic and dramatic situations, for many people close relationships might well come to matter even more than before; see Susan Wolf's comments, discussed in section 5 below.) However, he identifies various kinds of projects, activities, and traditions that, according to him, would be seriously jeopardized in the doomsday scenario.²

First, there are projects with specific goals, which in the doomsday scenario we simply will not have enough time to achieve. An example might be research on some highly complicated scientific issue, or constructing a society where all citizens have equal opportunities. Secondly, there are projects with specific goals, whose point mainly derives from their having beneficial consequences over an extended period of time. That is, whereas the goal itself may or may not require a lot of time to attain, it is valuable primarily as a means to a further goal, which does require a lot of time. As Scheffler points out, trying to find a cure for cancer presumably falls into both of these two categories. Projects that belong to the second but not the first category might be, for example, building new buildings of high quality materials, or solving certain environmental problems (see Scheffler 2013: 24–25). (Of course, even if the world is coming to an end soon, we might still be able to bring about the

² Note that my categorization below does not fully correspond to the one in Scheffler (2013: 42). For present purposes, I have lumped together some of his categories, and added one (the third one below).

truth of the counterfactual that, if the world *were not* coming to an end soon, then in the distant future the houses *would* be impressively robust and the air *would* be relatively clean. But that would be an utterly pointless endeavor.) While we are at it, I suppose that we could also add a related, third category: projects which there is no point in continuing simply because the doomsday scenario makes us attain the relevant goal much earlier. Consider for instance a research group devoted to figuring out what life on earth will be like in three hundred years: now they know the answer.

Projects of these three types are goal-oriented in a fairly straightforward way. Scheffler emphasizes, however, that there are also many other kinds of projects (and it is on these that I am going to concentrate in this paper).

A fourth category, for instance, is that of activities—such as many creative ones—that “tacitly depend for their success on their reception by an imagined future audience” (Scheffler 2013: 42). In the doomsday scenario, of course, there will be no such future audience (nor is there going to be anything to be the audience *of*). Fifth, there are projects whose point is to a considerable extent to preserve and sustain certain traditions, or certain collectives of people, over time. Think for instance of literary circles and their members, or natural languages and their speakers. In the doomsday scenario, no matter how energetically we try to keep these things alive, the asteroid is going to wipe all of them off the face of the earth (indeed, it is going to wipe the *earth* off the face of the earth).

Sixth, and perhaps most intriguingly, Scheffler suggests that the doomsday scenario would also threaten “many activities whose rewards seem independent of those activities’ contribution to any longer term process or undertaking” (Scheffler 2013: 42). Examples of such activities, he says, might be “the enjoyment of nature; the appreciation of literature, music, and the visual arts; the achievement of knowledge and understanding; and the appetitive pleasures of food, drink, and sex” (Scheffler 2013: 42). The idea is not, or not

primarily, that in the doomsday scenario we would be, for other reasons, too listless or depressed to find the motivation to engage in such activities. Rather, Scheffler suggests that we regard such activities as important components of “a human life as a whole,” our conception of which “relies on an implicit understanding of such a life as occupying a place in an ongoing human history, in a temporally extended chain of lives and generations” (Scheffler 2013: 43). Whether or not a person’s activities make any appreciable causal contribution to the history or process to which they belong, then, much of the meaning she ascribes to them presupposes the continued existence of that history or process. Her own activities may or may not be important in the long run, but the long run is important for her activities. And again, in the doomsday scenario there is not going to be any such long run.

3 Initial Remarks

Before we turn to my main points, I would like to make a few initial clarifications and other comments.

First, although Scheffler’s Afterlife Thesis is, as we have seen, that it matters greatly to us that there be other human beings long after our own deaths, on closer inspection his main contention does not seem to have any essential connection with death *per se*. The crucial claim appears rather to be that a good number of (for example) my most important projects presuppose, in certain noteworthy ways, the existence of human beings in the relatively distant future—*whether or not* I myself am still going to be there in that relatively distant future (which, as a matter of fact, I am of course not). At any rate, the doomsday scenario does not appear to provide any reason to believe that the relevant projects presuppose my being dead and gone in that distant future. For instance, it seems to offer no reason to think that I would find it any less meaningful to try to preserve various traditions, or enjoy nature any less, or appreciate film or literature any less, if I believed, or even knew, that I am going

to remain alive for several more centuries. The doomsday scenario shows rather (if Scheffler is right) that the projects do *not* presuppose that I myself am *not* going to be dead in that distant future. Alternatively put, even if my projects presuppose the existence of human beings long after time t , where t is the time of my death, they do not seem to do so *because* t is the time of my death. (More carefully, presumably some people do have some projects of that sort: for instance, someone might be very keen on dying in such a dramatic fashion that people will talk about it for several hundred years afterwards. But such projects are bound to be exceptions, and they are not among those that Scheffler considers.) None of this is a criticism of Scheffler: I do not mean to imply, for example, that his Afterlife Thesis is less interesting than one might have assumed; the point is simply that his Afterlife Thesis is less closely connected with the philosophy of death than one might have assumed. (In this it differs from Scheffler's other main thesis, about the unappealingness of immortality, which really is about immortality—and hence mortality—*per se*. See Scheffler 2013: 95.)

Second, recall that in the doomsday story we learn not only that there will be no collective afterlife, but also that we ourselves will nonetheless have lives with a normal life span. Obviously, the former is an extraordinary piece of news. But so is the latter. If I knew that I am going to live to old age, then this would likely affect me in several profound ways: most obviously, I would no longer have to worry about dying prematurely. However, in the present context this piece of knowledge seems merely to be a distracting factor; it is the knowledge of doomsday that is important for Scheffler's Afterlife Thesis. As far as I can see, it would do no harm to Scheffler's thought experiment if those of us who are easily distracted were to assume, not that we learn that we will have lives with a normal life span, but simply that (and just as in the actual scenario, for most of us) we have *no special reason to believe* that we are *not* going to have lives with a normal life span.

Third, a few words about descriptive and normative versions of Scheffler's position.

While Scheffler at some points questions claims to the effect that the attitudes he discusses would be irrational (e.g., Scheffler 2013: 31), he is apparently primarily interested in describing our reactions, rather than evaluating them: in saying what our reactions *would* be, rather than what they *should* be. Some might think that this makes his discussion more psychologically than philosophically interesting. Maybe this is so. But it still holds considerable philosophical interest: surely it is philosophically interesting to learn that our sense that various projects and activities matter to us depends in crucial and surprising ways on a belief in the collective afterlife. Moreover, the descriptive and normative issues are intertwined, especially since we are to some extent responsive to reasons. Since we are, facts about what reactions we would have provide at least some guidance to what reactions we should have; conversely, if a certain attitude is reasonable, then this seems to be at least some evidence that it is the one we would in fact have (see also Wolf 2013: 115).

Fourth, Scheffler stresses that in his discussion of what attitudes *we* would have, he is not necessarily talking about the attitudes of every human being ever alive. Rather, he means to be “characterizing my own attitudes and the attitudes of any other people who share them, however numerous these people may be” (Scheffler 2013: 18). His belief, however, is that these attitudes are at least “common enough to be of interest” (Scheffler 2013: 18). And they must indeed be rather common in order for Scheffler’s descriptions of the doomsday scenario to be correct, especially the more drastic ones (recall the passage quoted in section 2: “such a world would be a world characterized by widespread apathy, anomie, and despair ...”). In any case, I wish to emphasize that I am not merely going to argue for the hopelessly boring thesis—to which Scheffler would not object—that some people would not react in the way Scheffler describes. That would require no more than the general observation that people differ in their reactions to more or less everything; there is no reason to think that the doomsday scenario is an exception. Instead, I want to draw attention to a much more specific

consideration—the importance of a good ending—which, I believe, suggests that Scheffler’s portrayal of the doomsday scenario is overly bleak, and which indirectly suggests that the collective afterlife does not matter to our projects in quite the way he envisions. More cautiously, regardless of whether much or little weight should, in the end, be ascribed to the consideration I shall highlight, I think it does deserve to be highlighted: whatever its proper place in the “doomsday mix,” it should be in the mix.

4 A Good Ending

It seems to me plausible that, in the doomsday scenario, we would not generally be less interested in, or more detached from, our various projects, but would be anxious to make sure that they get a reasonably good ending. To begin to see why, consider first some examples—outside of the doomsday scenario—of the value we tend to attach to a good ending (of course, this is already a well-known phenomenon from, for example, the literature on narrative structure, but a few reminders will not hurt).

If my colleagues and I were to learn that, for reasons beyond our control, in the relatively near future our department will have to be closed down for good, I am sure that we would find this very regrettable. We would do so whether or not we would have to worry about finding similar jobs elsewhere—and indeed, whether or not we ourselves were going to leave the department soon anyway. But although we would be sad and disappointed—and initially shocked—I find it unlikely that we would lose any interest in the various departmental activities and traditions. On the contrary, we would be committed to making the final chapter of the department’s history as strong as possible—and largely *because* this would be the *final* chapter. Far from being indifferent to what was going to happen during the last departmental dinner, or during the last seminar sessions, we would be highly motivated to make them particularly worthwhile. Due to our respect for the department and its history, it

would matter greatly to us that it not end in an undignified way.

Similarly, I think I am not unusual in often having the following sort of experience. I have several times been on a week-long trip together with one of my friends. Each such trip is important to both of us, and we plan it carefully. During most of the trip, we really enjoy each other's company, and the presence of the friend enriches our respective experiences of the various beaches, meals, and concerts. Inevitably, after a few days we start to get on each other's nerves. On day five and day six, while we certainly do not regret going on the trip and have no wish to return home prematurely, even minor eccentricities in the other's behavior tend to annoy us. Nevertheless, both of us will undoubtedly make an effort to make sure that the seventh and last day will be one of the most pleasant ones, spent in high spirits. This is not primarily because our friendship would be adversely affected otherwise, but largely because we cherish the trip itself.

Likewise, imagine a writer for a television drama series. This is well-respected show that has been running for a considerable number of seasons, and working on it is highly rewarding and meaningful for her. Suppose, however, that the network tells her that after the next season—yet to be written—the show is going to be canceled. Obviously, she is going to put a lot of hard work into constructing a suitable ending; this is going to affect the quality of the story as a whole. But the ending will likely matter to her in another way as well. Presumably, if any of the seasons, or episode, is to be worse than the others, she strongly prefers it not to be the final one—even aside from the effects on the story as a whole. Even if she is OK with an uneven quality throughout the series, she will not want it to go downhill towards the end.

To some extent, the ending matters to us—in these and other cases—for broadly hedonist reasons: in particular, we want to have happy memories of the relevant events. But much of its importance seems independent of this factor, and of our future experiences more

generally. After all, the same kind of attitudes can be expected in a group who decide to commit collective suicide: presumably their last time together will have a special significance to them. Furthermore, the fact that a good ending gives us happy memories in the future largely *depends* on the importance of a good ending: arguably, if it did not matter independently of giving us pleasant memories, it would not give us pleasant memories.

In some cases—such as in the philosophy department example above—it is bad news that the relevant process or activity is coming to an end. In some cases, it is not bad at all. For instance, my trips with my friend are no more than one week long for a reason; and sometimes the actual total number of seasons and episodes of a television series is ideal (*Breaking Bad* and *Six Feet Under* come to mind; *True Blood* does not). The importance of giving something we care about a good ending seems largely independent of this factor. Whether or not we prefer it not to end so soon, we want it to end well.

Now, in the doomsday scenario *all* of the things we care about will be coming to an end in the relatively near future. Given what I have just said, it is hard to see why we would not largely be caught up in trying to give them a good ending. Indeed, this might be considered an engaging project in itself.

As we saw in section 2, Scheffler suggests that there are several types of projects that would be seriously threatened in the doomsday scenario. To repeat, in addition to straightforwardly goal-directed pursuits (like finding a cure for cancer), he mentions projects—such as many creative ones—that implicitly depend for their success on being appreciated by an imagined future audience (this was the fourth category listed in section 2); projects whose point is largely to preserve certain traditions, or collectives, over time (the fifth category); and activities that are significant parts of “a human life as a whole,” our conception of which “relies on an implicit understanding of such a life as occupying a place in an ongoing human history, in a temporally extended chain of lives and generations” (Scheffler

2013: 43; the sixth category).

But consider, for example, different aspects of literature—something that most of us care about in one way or another. (It is easy to see how to extrapolate from these examples.) As for the fourth category, even without an audience in the distant future, a writer would presumably not want to be a part of ending the literary tradition to which she belongs—or, for that matter, her own literary career—in an unsatisfactory way. Of course, most likely she would have preferred her books to have readers in the distant future, but surely that is more of a bonus that only very few writers can expect even if there is in fact going to be a collective afterlife (cf. Wolf 2013: 119). As for the fifth category, presumably members of a literary circle or society would like to secure that their tradition, and the collective they constitute, not end in a bad way—abandoned by those who are supposed to sustain them. Even though, in the doomsday scenario, no future generations would have any negative attitudes towards such negligence—for the simple reason that there will be no future generations at all—the fact that the relevant tradition and collective deserve a better ending seems to be sufficient motivation to ensure they get one. As for the sixth category, presumably individual book readers would not want to walk away from something that has meant so much to them; that would be a sign of disrespect at this final, and therefore particularly important time—both to literature itself and to the authors and to the individual reader herself. This does not mean that they would now merely work their way through the books out of an abstract duty, without really appreciating what is in them; rather, they would have a special motivation to get themselves into a state of mind where they do fully appreciate them.

Of course, the importance of X's ending is not independent of the importance of X. If we do not care about something, we probably do not care about how it ends either: I am indifferent to many soccer teams; unsurprisingly, I am also indifferent to how their history ends. A Schefflerian might contend that in the doomsday scenario, literature, for example,

would no longer matter to us to the extent that my claims presuppose, since we would know that there will be no collective afterlife. However, this seems to me to get the dialectical situation wrong. Scheffler's doomsday scenario is supposed to support his Afterlife Thesis (the thesis that the collective afterlife matters greatly to us). I have provided a ground for denying, or doubting, his claims about the doomsday scenario by appealing to a specific consideration—the importance of a good ending—for which there is, as we have seen, plenty of evidence outside of the doomsday scenario (and independently of reflections about the collective afterlife). It would not be dialectically appropriate to invoke the Afterlife Thesis as a way of questioning this argument.

Someone might object that I have misunderstood the role of the doomsday scenario in Scheffler's discussion. Its role, it may be suggested, is only to *illustrate* Scheffler's Afterlife Thesis—not to support it. (Alternatively, it may be suggested that although Scheffler did in fact intend the doomsday scenario to support the Afterlife Thesis, what he *should* say is that it is only an illustration of it.) Therefore, the Afterlife Thesis can after all be invoked—without any dialectical impropriety—to question my claim that, in the doomsday scenario, we would be motivated to give our various projects and traditions a good ending. However, this line of response seems to leave the Afterlife Thesis *without* support, especially since my main points apply equally well to Scheffler's other thought experiment, the infertility scenario (see section 2 above): it would be equally important there to give our projects and traditions a good ending. If these thought experiments do not support the Afterlife Thesis, it is hard to see what, in Scheffler's discussion, is supposed to do so. (And in any case, the question of whether the doomsday scenario supports the Afterlife Thesis seems to be of independent interest, regardless of Scheffler's intentions.)

I am not saying that we would not find doomsday regrettable. Nor am I saying that we would. My claims are compatible with either of these hypotheses. For as noted earlier, the

importance of a good ending is largely independent of whether or not we regard it as bad news that the end is near.

Furthermore, I need not deny that our participation in various projects in some sense implicitly presupposes the collective afterlife. Perhaps we normally take for granted that this presupposition is satisfied, and perhaps we act as we do largely because of this. However, as Susan Wolf remarks (Wolf 2013: 120), this does not show that the projects would seem less meaningful to us if it turned out that this presupposition is not satisfied. The truth about the future of humanity might be important for our projects regardless of the *content* of this truth. If so, then given another content (such as in the doomsday scenario), our projects would be reshaped in light of this alternative content, but this need not preclude us from regarding them as equally meaningful. For instance, in the doomsday scenario it would be highly rewarding to write and read novels, or create and perform movies, and so forth, that try to capture it and all that it entails.

5 Comparison with Wolf, Frankfurt, and Shiffrin

It will be instructive to relate the above considerations to some of those adduced by Scheffler's commentators in his book. (Here I leave out consideration of Niko Kolodny's many observations; incisive and insightful as they are, they mainly concern other issues than those relevant to my discussion (Kolodny 2013).)

Like me, Susan Wolf has a rather less pessimistic view of the doomsday scenario than Scheffler. She presents an alternative "afterlife conjecture," which she regards as at least plausible enough to challenge Scheffler's. On this alternative picture, although our motivation to pursue various projects might well initially be considerably weakened by the knowledge of humanity's curtailed future, after a while we would be focussed on the comfort and care of others. This would lead us to resume various artistic and other activities (such as

creating and performing plays, planting gardens, and holding discussion groups), whereby these would once again become important to us. “Being motivated at first to help and comfort each other,” Wolf suggests, “we might find ourselves reengaged by the beauty, the challenge, and the interest these projects held for us in our predoomsday lives” (Wolf 2013: 122). In his reply, Scheffler points out that Wolf’s conjecture presupposes the Afterlife Thesis. It is precisely because the collective afterlife matters so much to us that we would need to comfort each other; if we did not regard the doomsday scenario as deeply tragic, this help and comfort would not be called for. Note that this reply is not applicable to my appeal to the importance of a good ending. I am not proposing that we would wish to give our various traditions and projects a good ending in order to comfort each other. A good ending may sometimes *be* a kind of comfort, but again, it is important whether or not it is regrettable that the relevant phenomenon is about to end.

Harry Frankfurt (Frankfurt 2013: 135–136) points out that many people who learn that they are terminally ill stop wasting their time and make the best use possible of the time they have left. Similarly, he suggests, many people can be expected to have this sort of reaction to the news that the future of humanity is surprisingly short. True or not (Scheffler doubts it; Scheffler 2013: 187–188), this suggestion is not the one I have been making. Unlike Frankfurt, I am appealing to the ending as such; the crucial matter is not that the final chapter is short, but that it is the final chapter.

According to Seana Shiffrin, something that is particularly sad about the doomsday scenario is that our valuable activities—and, even more importantly, the very practice of valuing—come to an end *for no good reason*. When valuable things end for a good reason, the change may sadden us, but it does not result in the “special kind of dismay or despair” (Shiffrin 2013: 151) that valuable things’ ending for no reason, or for a bad reason, tends to produce. While I find much to agree with in Shiffrin’s discussion, it should be emphasized

that my point about the importance of a good ending is independent of her suggestion; it is compatible both with its truth and with its falsity. In particular, I am certainly not claiming that by giving something a good ending, we also bring about that it ends for a good reason.

6 Concluding Remarks

One final point—a rather tentative and speculative one—seems worth mentioning. I have provided grounds for doubting Scheffler’s afterlife conjecture: his dark picture of the doomsday scenario. Suppose, however, that his picture is correct. This may still be largely for another reason than the one he posits—one that has nothing in particular to do with the (alleged) importance of a collective afterlife. If so, his afterlife conjecture—even if correct—does not support, or even illustrate, the Afterlife Thesis.

Note that, given our actual epistemic situation, there are lots of possible ways the future might go. Even if the future is in fact causally determined, we nonetheless do not know what it will be like—at least certainly not in any great detail. Perhaps if we did know in detail what the situation for the human race will be like in the not too distant future, we would lose much of our motivation to engage in our different projects. When we participate in an activity, we are parts of something that, for all we know, may go in various different directions in the future. Such ignorance might give our different pursuits much of their meaning; indeed, it may be argued that without it they would be more or less unrecognizable.

Now, in the doomsday scenario, we will know much more about the future of our projects and traditions than we actually do: before too long, they will be gone without a trace. If this piece of knowledge would result in apathy and dismay, this might largely be for the reason given. In that case, such apathy and dismay would also result if we instead learnt that there will definitely be a collective afterlife and knew in detail what it is going to be like. The significance of the collective afterlife as such plays no role in this account.

References

- Fischer, J. M. 2013. Immortality. In *Oxford handbook of philosophy of death*, eds. B. Bradley, F. Feldman, and J. Johansson, 336–354. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Frankfurt, H. 2013. How the afterlife matters. In Scheffler 2013, 131–141.
- Kolodny, N. 2013. That I should die and others live. In Scheffler 2013, 159–173.
- Scheffler, S. 2013. *Death and the afterlife*, ed. N. Kolodny. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shiffrin, S. V. 2013. Preserving the valued or preserving valuing? In Scheffler 2013, 143–158.
- Williams, B. 1973. The Macropulos Case: Reflections on the tedium of immortality. In *Problems of the self*, 82–100. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Reprinted in *The metaphysics of death*, ed. J. M. Fischer, 73–92. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.)
- Wolf, S. 2013. The significance of doomsday. In Scheffler 2013, 113–129.