

## Bergson, Heidegger, and the Temporality of Immortality

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Many transhumanists hope near-future developments in various medical and engineering fields will eventually lead to the end of human mortality. There are numerous practical obstacles, moral conundrums, and conceptual issues here that must be addressed, but a more fundamental problem for visions of something approximating immortality concerns the enthusiasm for these visions itself. Even if it were possible to extend human lives indefinitely, are lives that last (potentially) forever really worth wanting? We consider some key arguments in what has come to be known as the “desirability of immortality” debate. The arguments of greatest interest are those focusing on the relationship between time and value. After briefly sketching them out, we contrast them with Henri Bergson’s account of time as duration. When one relies on Bergson, and related ideas in Martin Heidegger’s work, it becomes clear that the absence of death need not render an immortal life meaningless, as some philosophers believe.

**Keywords:** Henri Bergson – Martin Heidegger – risk – Samuel Scheffler – transhumanism – urgency – value

While dreams of everlasting life are nothing new, many transhumanist techno-optimists are convinced we are now entering an age in which practical immortality might become a genuine technological possibility. Speculation about sophisticated medical intervention, cyborgization, nanotechnology, and mind-uploading raises numerous concerns about practical obstacles, moral conundrums, and conceptual stumbling blocks that cannot be ignored. For example, the very notion of mind-uploading seems to run afoul of dominant theories of personal identity. However, even if we de-emphasize such issues for the moment, a more fundamental problem for transhumanist visions of

something approximating immortality concerns the enthusiasm for these visions itself. Even if it were possible to extend human lives indefinitely, are lives lasting (potentially) forever what we really want? This paper considers some key arguments in what is known as the “desirability of immortality” debate, especially those focusing on the relationship between time and value, which open the door to compelling insights from Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger.

### **I. Desirability, Boredom, and Value**

Literary cautionary tales have long made cases against the desirability of immortality. Before fears about technological hubris, “too good to be true” deals with the devil, twisted punishments by the gods, and other supernatural conceits reminded humans to keep on the straight and narrow and be grateful for what they have. Although philosophers have often pondered issues of immortality, their focus was rarely on whether humans should actually want to live forever. In the last half century, however, philosophical interest in this topic has grown dramatically. Without demonstrating direct causation where there may mostly be mere correlation, this growth is probably not entirely coincidental. No longer just a scenario relegated to the realms of religion and fantasy, the implications of immortality made possible by hypothetical near-future technological advances are worth consideration by even the most secular and scientifically minded.

There are, of course, practical and ethical arguments about environmental impact, overpopulation, dwindling resources, and accessibility of relevant technologies (see, e.g., Cutas 2008), but the main thread of philosophical discussion concerns the meaning or value of everlasting existence itself.<sup>1</sup> The most famous desirability of immortality argument comes from Bernard Williams, who claims personal existence extended even a few hundred years beyond the ordinary human lifespan would become intolerably boring. The problem he articulates is that maintaining personal identity involves a certain rigidity when it comes to the range of activities and goals one finds appealing. Unfortunately, this restricted range means an individual will eventually run out of reasons to want to go on living, and end up bored. The only way to avoid this irreparably tedious situation would be to give up on one’s identity/interests, but this solution comes with the equally unacceptable consequence of sacrificing the

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<sup>1</sup> It is common in work on the desirability of immortality to use “meaning” and “value” somewhat interchangeably, or at least to speak about valuable experiences as largely constitutive of meaningful life.

reason to want immortality in the first place. Why go on living even a bit longer, if it is not really “me” continuing into the future (Williams 1993)?

Many thinkers have responded to Williams’ surprisingly resilient argument, but perhaps none as notably as John Martin Fischer, who believes Williams did not pay enough attention to repeatable pleasures and activities. Williams seems to think the things that make life worth living are necessarily exhaustible, but Fischer raises several examples illustrating that many of the pleasures and activities that keep us going actually come up again and again. Provided we space these experiences out and intersperse them with others, Fischer (2009) sees no reason to believe they would eventually lose their appeal and leave us permanently bored. Thus, even with a relatively fixed identity or character, immortality might not be so bad.

But these arguments about boredom are just the tip of the iceberg. A more recent, and subtler, assault on the viability of immortality has come to dominate the conversation. In *Death and the Afterlife*, Samuel Scheffler argues immortality would be meaningless because it would lack temporal limitations. Starting from this premise, he identifies three complications for the meaningfulness of immortality – an immortal life would lack (1) the shape of life-stages, (2) risks of loss and injury, and (3) urgency.<sup>2</sup> As we will demonstrate, however, Scheffler’s argument depends on a problematically abstract conception of time. After briefly sketching out his understanding of immortality, we will look closer at this conception of time and contrast it with Bergson’s account of time as duration. Relying on Bergson, and related Heideggerian ideas, it becomes clear the absence of death need not render an immortal life meaningless because human values are based primarily in life, not death.

## **II. Scheffler’s Assumptions**

Scheffler (2013, 99) posits immortals profoundly disconnected from human experience:

imagine creatures who have...nothing...that matches our experience of decisions made against the background of the limits imposed by the ultimate scarce resource, time. But *every* human decision is made against that background, and so in imagining immortality we are imagining an existence in which there are, effectively, no human decisions.

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<sup>2</sup> Although we focus on Scheffler here, others make similar points in earlier work (e.g., May (2009), Nussbaum (1994), and Smuts (2011)).

According to Scheffler, immortals would be inhuman because human life requires temporal scarcity. Although he admits “immortality would not eliminate all forms of temporal scarcity from human life” (Scheffler 2013, 99, note 15), it would remove the most important one, that imposed on us by our inevitable death. Because choices are an important source of meaning in human lives, and because they have always been constrained by mortality (and, as discussed in greater detail below, the life stages and sense of risk and urgency that come with it), a life without death would not have human meaning.

The problem is that if one defines immortality as inhuman up front, arguing it would not be meaningful by human standards begs the question. We follow Fischer (2009) in not starting our investigation with radically different standards for mortal and immortal lives. It is far from obvious ordinary human lives and immortal lives could not be similarly meaningful. Of course, one should not dismiss Scheffler’s objections too easily, but it is important to recognize that his conclusion seems dependent on a dubious supposition.

And it is not the only one. Scheffler (2013, 95, note 11) says, “I am here implicitly assuming that there are only two possibilities: either one actually dies, or one necessarily lives forever – that is, one is subject to no risk of death at any time.” His account rules out being immortal, yet subject to death under specific conditions – e.g., a nearby supernova. This invulnerability requirement is rather strict and unwarranted; the less extreme scenarios techno-optimists hope advancing technology makes possible involve merely eliminating the *necessity* of death. Nonetheless, we will grant this assumption for the sake of argument. If we can defend unconditional immortality from meaninglessness, there should be no concerns about the less ambitious indefinite life extension many transhumanists seek.<sup>3</sup>

### III. Abstract vs. Lived Time

Before considering Scheffler’s specific objections, it will be helpful to scrutinize his view of time. Scheffler (2013, 100) regards individual life as something necessarily divided into stages and defined by limitations:

It is essential to our idea of a life that it is temporally bounded, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and with stages of development defining

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes (2007, 11) says “most transhumanists only use the term ‘immortality’...as a synonym for radical longevity.”

its normal trajectory. A life without temporal boundaries would no more be a life than a circle without a circumference would be a circle.

For a life to have any meaning or make sense, according to Scheffler, one must have some notion of its completeness and the steps generally necessary to reach it.

Bergson (2007, 8, 18) puts this way of seeing life in terms of spatializing time, which involves confusion between time as duration and time as extension. Scheffler clearly expresses time in terms of extension, or space; he evokes the spatial imagery of a “trajectory” and a “circumference” to describe it. On more than one occasion, he also uses the language of “place,” an inherently spatialized concept, to discuss the significance of life stages (see, e.g., Scheffler 2013, 96, 100). According to Bergson (2007, 6 – 7), this spatiality of time arrests its movement by making it into a measurable, quantifiable succession of separate stages:

The line one measures is immobile, time is mobility. The line is made, it is complete; time is what is happening, and more than that, it is what causes everything to happen. The measuring of time never deals with duration as duration; what is counted is only a certain number of extremities of intervals, or moments, in short, virtual halts in time.

Putting time in spatial terms means not speaking of time itself, but of an abstraction taken out of its lived context and isolated for reflective understanding. Because Scheffler (2013, 96) divides time into intervals – he measures “how much time is taken to be available for [each] stage” – he does not deal with lived time but only with an abstract series of “snapshots” (Bergson 2007, 9). Time, understood this way, “is no more than a space in idea where one imagines to be set out in line all past, present and future events...something which prevents them from appearing in a single perception” (Bergson 2007, 11). We might sometimes speak or think about time like this, but it is not how we experience it in life itself.

Against spatialized time, Bergson proposes a conception of time as duration. While spatialized time is what one thinks, duration “is what one feels and lives” (Bergson 2007, 7). It is time experienced by a living person as indefinitely and continuously flowing:

the essence of duration is to flow...the fixed placed side by side with the fixed will never constitute anything which has duration. It is not the “states,” simple snapshots we have taken once again along the course of change, that are real...it is flux, the continuity of transition, it is change itself that is real.

This change is indivisible...What we have here is merely an uninterrupted thrust of change – of a change always adhering to itself in a duration which extends indefinitely (Bergson 2007, 10).

Time, as duration, is the indivisible, unceasing continuity of change; it does not consist of static moments, but flows without interruption. Although duration provides certain boundaries to existence – “time is what hinders everything from being given at once” (Bergson 2007, 69) – it is itself without boundaries and experienced without end. Bergson (2007, 56) claims “our whole life, from the time of our first awakening to consciousness, is something like [an] indefinitely prolonged discourse.” Lived time is defined by the possibilities of life, not the limitations of death Scheffler focuses on. As Bergson (2007, 96) poetically explains: “No more inert states, no more dead things; nothing but the mobility of which the stability of life is made.”

Bergson (2007, 13) puts this emphasis on possibilities and mobility in terms of creativity; in duration, “there is perpetual creation of possibility.” What allows for the creation of new possibilities is the constant changing inherent in the flow of time; one’s lived experience is not yet finished and therefore still indeterminate (Bergson 2007, 69). Here, Bergson’s view approaches one of the most important points Heidegger makes in *Sein und Zeit*. The self-aware entity Heidegger calls “Dasein” (literally, “being-there”) – which is a less specific and loaded term for the sort of being humans (usually) are – is essentially oriented toward future possibilities. As we discuss in a later section, this orientation means Dasein’s existence is always a bit open and incomplete; something about it is always outstanding [*aussteht*] (Heidegger 1927, 236). Dasein constantly has potential in it not yet realized. Synthesizing Bergson and Heidegger, being-in-time involves a creative being-toward a still indeterminate future. In Bergson’s words (1944), the duration of life is a “creative evolution.”

Although Bergson does not actually discuss immortality in this context, it seems possible an immortal would experience its “life-time” in much the same way mortals do, as an uninterrupted flow in the present, from a past to an open-ended future of creative possibilities. Rather than lamenting immortal life as abstractly unlimited – which undermines the significance of conceptually discrete life-stages – why not revel in it as this continuous flow of the present? That is, as “the uninterrupted prolongation of the past into a present which is already blending into the future” (Bergson 2007, 23). Not only is Bergson’s account of time superior to Scheffler’s in characterizing ordinary lived experience – which is not so neatly broken up into supposedly

meaningful life-stages – but also, the view of immortality following from it need not lead to special fears of formless incomprehensibility.

#### **IV. Problems of Temporal Scarcity**

Having laid out Scheffler's view of time's role in giving meaning to life, and contrasted it with Bergson's, it should be clearer why Scheffler (2013, 95) says "we need to die...an eternal life would, in a sense, be no life at all." According to him, human life can be meaningful only when bounded by the conclusion of death and organized with reference to it. As mentioned above, Scheffler's position is supported by three main objections to unconditional immortality. With Bergson's account of duration in mind, and aided by several other relevant arguments, we aim to dispel each one.

*The Shape Objection.* Scheffler's first objection has already been partly discussed – a meaningful life is defined by a complete series of life-stages, which cannot be had without an ending. These stages orient us and dictate the range of meaningful choices available in each one. Each stage itself derives its significance from its relationships to other stages, and from its place in the whole series from birth to death (Scheffler 2013, 96). Without a beginning and an end, life would be ill defined, or shapeless, and the stages we now see in life would cease to orient us as they have; one cannot be middle-aged, and do middle-aged things, if one's life has no middle.

In response to this kind of argument, Chappell (2007) suggests a better way to think of life's shape is in terms of an indefinitely long rope. Its various strands represent the many projects one might take up over the course of a life, projects that give it meaning. Just as the strands at one point in the rope do not overlap directly with the strands at another point, no one can pursue all the projects they might like simultaneously. What limits us and gives us shape, according to Chappell, are the projects chosen and the order of the choosing. Even if an immortal eventually exhausted all meaningful projects (which seems unlikely), his or her life would still be shaped by the unique order in which they were pursued.

But this sort of shape is clearly not what Scheffler wants. Just as strands of a rope overlap and blend in with one another, one's projects cannot be so decisively sorted into what is appropriate to specific life-stages. Bergson (2007, 23) considers the example of a certain stage of human physiology:

It is evident that a change like that of puberty is in course of preparation at every instant from birth, and even before birth, and that the aging up to that crisis consists, in part at least, of this gradual preparation.

One gradually grows from child into adult. One does not wake up to suddenly find oneself in another stage of life, with entirely new tasks and goals: “The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change” (Bergson 1944, 4). As explained above, time – as duration – flows unceasingly into the future, and only when one stops to reflect in abstraction on one’s present state as compared to an earlier state does one notice development.<sup>4</sup> Historians explain events by placing them into eras, and people can explain their pasts retrospectively in terms of life-stages, but immortals could do this just as well as mortals.

It is not just in looking back, however, that people rely on abstract life-stages. Insofar as humans have things in common, norms develop, creating future expectations for general stages of life. These norms and expectations are important to Scheffler’s sense of value in life, but there are a couple of reasons not to place so much emphasis on precisely what guidance they offer. First, the guidance is not absolute; it shifts historically and culturally, even during ordinary mortal life. Why, then, should it matter if immortals’ values change over long periods of time? Second, as Bergson’s account of time implies, one cannot have certainty about the future because duration is an open-ended, somewhat unpredictable creation of possibilities. Norms and expectations do not entirely determine what any individual, mortal or not, will experience in some abstract life-stage.

Nonetheless, Scheffler’s main point is that the primary source of norms and expectations – and thus, of values – is the fact that human lives and their stages have always ended in death. Without a mortal life’s sense of completion, any values that might develop would be unrecognizable to humans. It is worth reiterating here that this sense of completion, like the notion of life-stages, is mere abstraction. Returning to Chappell’s helpful image, death is not the neat completion of a series of stages, or a careful concluding of a set of projects; it is the sudden cutting of a rope in the middle of several ongoing strands. Furthermore, mortals never experience their lives’ completion because they do not experience their own deaths.<sup>5</sup> This point derives from Epicurus (1994), who speaks of the non-coincidence of the experiencing being and the state of being dead. In line

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<sup>4</sup> Think of how we can fail to notice our aging until we see a literal snapshot allowing us to compare the present with the past.

<sup>5</sup> Similar points hold against seeing meaningful life in terms of completed narrative. Death does stop a life story, but not in a meaningful way for the one who was living it (cf. Buben 2016, 388, 397 – 398).

with Epicurus, Heidegger (1927, 237) argues Dasein's own passing away is not part of its experience (cf. Buben 2016, 390; Watts 2011, 103). When Dasein reaches its end, it ceases to "be-there." Since one cannot experience one's own demise, one cannot experience one's life as a completed set of stages. Whatever conclusion-based shape is imagined for life, it depends on abstract norms derived from a way of partitioning time that does not mesh with the indefinite flow of lived experience, a flow characteristic of life, whether or not it ends.

*The Risk Objection.* Scheffler's (2013, 96 – 97) second objection states that the risk of death grounds ordinary human notions of risk, loss, harm, and their counterparts, security, gain, and benefit. With no chance of death, an unconditionally immortal life would lack such concepts and would, thus, not be recognizably human. Without these concepts and the way they inform decisions, an immortal's choices could not provide life with the meaning they do for a mortal. If one cannot die, there is little at stake when choosing to engage in traditionally dangerous activities, e.g. firefighting, skydiving, and shooting heroin.

Despite Scheffler's claims, concepts such as risk and harm would likely have equivalents in immortal life. On Bergson's view of time as an uninterrupted flow, there is no strict separation between past, present, and future; the past is always part of the present, and the present is always becoming the future. The distinction between what we call present and past is just relative to our attention span: "our present falls back into the past when we cease to attribute to it an immediate interest" (Bergson 2007, 115). But this falling back is not falling out of touch. As Bergson (1944, 24) puts it,

the present moment of a living body does not find its explanation in the moment immediately before...*all* the past of the organism must be added to that moment, its heredity – in fact, the whole of a very long history.

So what does this imply about risk in unconditionally immortal life? The impossibility of death is itself a potent source of risk because an immortal would have to carry its past along forever. While there would be ample opportunity to rectify some errors and failures in immortal life, the weight of others could become crushing: e.g. the irremediable loss of someone's affection might haunt a person forever (cf. Kolodny 2013). It is not always easy to preserve what one values, given the incessant change inherent in the forward march of time, and some things may not come around again (cf. Bergson 1944, 8, 52).

The only thing immortals *cannot* lose is life, and this fact can make other things mean more. In a sense, immortality comes with far greater responsibility

than mortal life, which has a certain lightness since it will end anyway. Eternal life must be eternally cared for. For a mortal, even the worst things done or experienced will be obliterated by death, but death will never save an immortal from an unlivable life. Survival for a mortal just means staying alive; for an immortal, it means holding onto what one values, maintaining the conditions that make life worthwhile. Consequently, the stakes seem (perhaps infinitely) higher for immortals. That is why those things that can be preserved would take on greater significance, and it is doubtful the meaningful notions of risk, loss, harm, etc. would go missing in immortal life.

*The Urgency-Objection.* Scheffler's (2013, 99) final concern about immortality has to do with deadlines, literal and figurative:

consider the extent to which our assignments of value are a response to the limits of time. Those limits, and especially the constraints they impose upon us in contexts of decision, force upon us the need to establish priorities, to guide our lives under a conception of which things are worth doing and caring about and choosing.

Having to prioritize projects we want to engage in is (in part) what makes them valuable. With unlimited time, there would be no need to "establish priorities," and our activities would lose urgency. Scheffler (2013, 99) says immortals would see little point in pursuing any projects: "Without such [temporal] limits, it is at best unclear how far we would be guided by ideas of value at all." Because immortal life would not have a literal deadline, all metaphorical deadlines would mean less.

However, even if life were endless, it would still be situated in time. In Bergson's sense of duration, time is scarce because it flows without stopping and cannot be reversed. Endless life would not be free of this basic structure. While it would lack the temporal scarcity caused by death, the flow of life itself would still provide meaningful limits and deadlines. These other sources of temporal scarcity would likely become even more significant to compensate for the removal of death. Thus, immortal life could continue to be meaningful in some of the same ways mortal life is. Even without worries about dying before finishing projects, they will still fail if no time is invested in them, and one cannot invest time in all of them at once. Of course, many projects can wait, and the concern is that, absent the pressure of a finite life, there is little reason not to put things off. But some projects and activities come with built-in deadlines (cf. Kolodny 2013). Becoming the world's greatest hotdog-eater will

be impossible once hotdog-eating contests (or hotdogs) are no longer a thing. As in mortal life, a certain prioritization seems unavoidable.<sup>6</sup>

Tying these issues to what was said above about risk and loss in immortal life, missing an opportunity might be far more painful for an immortal. Since mortals die, their regrets have expiration dates. An immortal, however, might forever lament a missed chance, and knowing that eternal regret is possible might lead to intense FOMO. Thus, it seems fair to think context-specific and limited-offer projects/activities could still provide meaningful urgency, perhaps even more so than for mortals.

## **V. Death- and Life-Based Values**

Dispelling Scheffler's objections demonstrates how life can still have structure and value based on temporal scarcity, even without death. It should now be easier to understand why it is not death, but life itself that is the primary source of human meaning. On Scheffler's (2013, 100) view, however, values are death-based because "our confidence in the values that make our lives worth living depends on the place of the things that we value in the lives of temporally bounded creatures like ourselves." Because human values have developed in lives always limited by death, values arising in a deathless existence would not be ones we could trust or relate to. It is not that Scheffler thinks death somehow provides meaning or values *per se*, but rather that we would not have formed the values we have without it, and that it is doubtful such values would persist if death were suddenly eliminated.

In his words,

our recognition of our own individual mortality exerts a formative influence on our attitudes as individual subjects and...forces upon us the need to guide our lives under a conception of which things are worth doing and caring about and choosing. In so doing, it is implicated in the formation and development of our ideas of value from the outset (Scheffler 2013, 109).

Note that Scheffler specifies the "recognition" of one's mortality, rather than death or mortality itself, as necessary for developing our values. Putting the point like this suggests that one way of preserving our values in immortal life would involve "creating the mere *appearance* of temporal scarcity" (Greene 2017, 429). If an indestructible individual were somehow convinced he or she

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<sup>6</sup> Greene (2017, 430–431) adds that immortals would prioritize like we do because they would also "prefer positive experiences to be near rather than distant, and negative experiences to be distant rather than near."

could die, this person's values might still resemble those of mortals. Assuming Scheffler does not mean to allow for this easy way out of the problem he sets up, he must make the stronger claim that "temporal scarcity is required for a life to be of *value*, and that this temporal scarcity must specifically concern *time alive*" (Greene 2017, 429). And this claim, reaffirming the necessity of death for the meaning of life, is difficult to defend.

Death is not part of life, as explained in the earlier discussion of Epicurus and Heidegger. If death is essential for its meaning, life has meaning by virtue of what is not part of it, which seems a bit counterintuitive. Despite her opposition to unconditional immortality, even Christine Overall states:

The belief that death, or at least the prospect of death, is necessary to give meaning to human existence elevates personal extinction over personal projects in a way that ignores the real significance we attribute to human lives (Overall 2003, 150).

If life has any meaning at all, its meaning should not be derived from death but should instead be based within life itself. In focusing on the limitations death provides, Scheffler pays insufficient attention to the possibilities of life. Death may have impacted the way our current values developed, but it is life that is the absolutely necessary precondition for any meaning or value whatsoever. At this point, it might help to give Heidegger a more prominent place in the discussion.

Although Heidegger distances himself somewhat from Bergson's view of time, he is nevertheless influenced by him, and shares Bergson's interest in considering a more fundamental sense of temporality.<sup>7</sup> While engaging with Bergson, Heidegger also stresses the importance of something like a lived-in experience of time, and thereby provides further support for life-based values.<sup>8</sup> At first glance, things might appear otherwise, as Heidegger coins the decidedly Scheffler-esque expression "Being-towards-death" [*Sein-zum-Tode*] to describe a key element of Dasein's existence. But, as one of us has argued in much greater detail (see Buben 2016), this expression turns out to be a bit misleading because

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<sup>7</sup> Briefly, Heidegger (1927, 18, 26, 333, 432 – 433, note) objects that Bergson merely reverses the spatialized concept of time he inherits from Aristotle, and thereby covers over the primordial sense of temporality he means to uncover. Heidegger, for his part, thinks uncovering this sense of temporality is tied to the ontological examination of Dasein he undertakes in *Sein und Zeit*. For more on these issues, see Massey (2015, especially 87 – 89).

<sup>8</sup> This "something like" is necessary to acknowledge that Heidegger, unlike Bergson, explicitly avoids putting these matters in terms of life, opting instead for the more fundamental "Being-in-the-world" discussed below.

Heidegger's focus is not so much on the "death" as it is on the "Being-towards."<sup>9</sup> And this focus implies it is not its death, but its being-towards future possibilities, that most properly characterizes Dasein (Heidegger 1927, 261).

In order to arrive at his notion of Being-towards-death, Heidegger begins by describing Dasein as essentially "Being-in-the-world." As Being-in-the-world, Dasein does not just arise out of nowhere, but first appears as a being that has relationships with others and concern for, or interest in, the things and activities it encounters. These concerns and relationships are largely determined by the socio-cultural situation Dasein finds itself thrown into. However, this thrownness also includes its previous decisions, its capabilities, and any other limiting factors that can broadly be understood as a "past" or "facticity" establishing for Dasein which options are available to it in moments of decision (Heidegger 1927, 56 – 57, 276). In these "present" moments, Dasein takes up and pursues certain possibilities from among this range of available options. This projecting (a literal "hurling-forth") of itself is what Heidegger puts in terms of "futurity." Taken together, this temporal structure, this constant thrown-projection, constitutes the lived experience of Dasein as Being-in-the-world, and it is through this structure that Dasein is able to attribute meaning to itself (Heidegger 1927, 192 – 193, 233 – 234). By engaging in projects and relationships of its own choosing from among the limited options it has in any particular situation, Dasein can come to define itself and find value in its own existence.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to notice that, in this account of the structural totality of Dasein, there is no reason to think meaningful lived experience must come to some kind of conclusion (cf. Call 2013, 127 – 128; Watts 2011, 103 – 104). "Being-towards-death" is an expression Heidegger uses to discuss the last part of this temporal structure – Dasein's projecting ahead of itself into possibilities (Heidegger 1927, 251). What he means by associating these two ideas is something like: as long as it is, Dasein is the kind of being that reaches out towards future possibilities. It could certainly be the case that particular Dasein will cease to be "in-the-world," and empirically this is what has happened to each being that could rightfully be called "Dasein" up to this point in our

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<sup>9</sup> Some think Heidegger is talking about mortality, but he avoids such biologically tinged language, much as he does with "life" and "human."

<sup>10</sup> Often, however, one does not really choose for oneself, but instead complacently adheres to meanings imposed and dictated by the "they-self" [*man-selbst*] (see, e.g., Heidegger 1927, 129, 263, 266). Dasein gets caught up in doing "what one does" based on predetermined norms and expectations one is thrown into, without taking proper ownership of, or responsibility for, the choices one can and must still make.

history. However, if transhumanists get their way and tech developments come along and alter the empirical “facts” of the matter, there is nothing structurally necessary that would prevent this “as long as it is” from pursuing meaningful projects and relationships indefinitely (Heidegger 1927, 245). On Heidegger’s view, the value of existence ultimately comes from existing and not from ceasing to exist. With or without the possibility of physical demise, Dasein – however long it exists – is Being-in-the-world, with a fairly strict (but not entirely inflexible) set of background limitations, and a fairly liberated (but not entirely unconstrained) outlook (Heidegger 1927, 266, 276). Thus, it seems Heidegger joins Bergson in providing reasons to reject the kind of negative treatment of immortality found in Scheffler (which does not imply either would be immortality enthusiasts themselves).

## VI. Conclusion

Since it is not death from which we derive meaning, but our lived experience within time, life could be valuable whether or not it includes the possibility of death. We do not need an external time limit to motivate us to seize the day and make something of ourselves. We have all the motivation we need in the temporal limitations built into our engagement with a dynamic, complex universe of other people, objects, and activities. It is through the constantly changing circumstances of existing, described in terms of either Bergson’s sense of flowing duration, or Heidegger’s sense of thrown-projection, that life will of itself provide limitations and possibilities for creating value or making meaning. However different it might be, immortality would not alter this basic situation. This is not to say immortality would necessarily be desirable; immortal life would be as desirable as any life, and in many cases, lives are not very desirable at all.

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