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Rescuing Ivan Ilych

HOW WE LIVE AND HOW WE DIE

We are all likely to agree that Ivan Ilych did not live as he should have.[1, 2, 3] The question is, what does this have to do with the sort of death he had? That is, would someone who had lived differently necessarily have had a different sort of death, in the sense that his process of dying and also what his death itself signified would be different? And would everyone who lived as Ivan lived have Ivan's sort of death? Tolstoy exhibits a critical attitude toward Ivan, his wife, and doctors when they think that there is a way for him to avoid death on this occasion by doing something different (for example, taking medicines regularly). Their need for control is taken to exemplify their failure to understand what is going on. When Ivan asks himself why he has to suffer physically and die if not because he has done something wrong for which he is being punished, our first impulse is to disagree; this is not the explanation of what is happening to him.[4] However, I wish to consider the possibility that Tolstoy's story reveals how we can have some control over our deaths—the process of dying and what death itself signifies—by how we choose to live. I shall consider several characteristics of Ivan's death and dying process and see whether their presence could vary with how we live.

I

One of the characteristics of Ivan's death is that he does not believe that it could possibly happen to him.[5] Ivan says that he knew the syllogism "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal," and he believed it to be true of Caius and of man in the abstract—but what did that have to do with him, Ivan? He was not a man in the abstract but someone with particular characteristics and a rich subjectivity.[6] Perhaps Ivan's logical difficulty may be described as follows: he thinks that the universal premise "All men are mortal" does not apply when a man has particular characteristics and especially an active subjective life. So, in a sense, he

is raising an objection to the correctness of the universal premise. Of course, he is wrong to think that having particular characteristics and an active subjective life are defenses against death. However, he also makes another mistake. He treats Caius, who would be a particular person with a particular history and rich subjectivity, as a man in the abstract and therefore not in possession of characteristics that would protect him from mortality as much as Ivan's version of those characteristics are supposed to protect Ivan.

Ivan's reason for failing to see that the syllogism applies to him though he believes that it applies to Caius connects up with the way he has lived his life: he has not taken seriously the nonabstract reality of other persons (which is not to say that he has taken his reality as seriously as he should have either). So, when something bad happens to them, he finds no reason to think that it will happen to him. In his professional role as a judge, he has never taken seriously what their fates mean to the people whose lives depend on his decisions. He has focused on the law and its outcome, not on its impact on the persons at trial. In his personal relations, he has developed standard responses to his wife that will prevent his life from being upset by having to engage with her problems. It would be easier for him to accept the universal premise in the syllogism and its application to him if he took seriously—given his knowledge that others die—that others have the same special reality to themselves that he has to himself.

Ivan's failure to seriously accept a universal premise also shows itself in his inability to accept that he can come to be treated by others as he has treated others. The "turning of the tables" motif is strong in the story. Doctors treat him as a set of organs rather than as a person whose life is at stake, in the way he has treated defendants as interesting cases rather than as persons whose lives were at stake.[7] His wife takes up a standard line to help her cope with his illness as he took up a standard line with her. (Her line fails to deal seriously with him as a dying person; she claims that he is to blame for not following doctors' orders and if he followed them, he need not die.) In sum, Ivan believed that it was all right to act on a maxim toward others that he would not be willing to universalize, including to have applied to himself.

However, if Ivan were treated *only* as he has treated others, he would not have received the honest and sympathetic concern of Gerasim, his servant. Possibly, Gerasim's help may be seen as a cosmic return for Ivan's own better impulses, which are described as being repressed after childhood.

Despite his difficulties with including himself in universals and his mistaking why others are susceptible to them, there is one logical move with which Ivan has no problems. One way of thinking of this move is from the singular case involving something bad happening to himself to the *universal* of something bad happening to everyone. Once he realizes that he will die, he reflects on the coming deaths of others who are as foolish as he was in not realizing that they will die. Instead of pitying them as he wishes to be pitied, he takes satisfaction in their susceptibility to the universality of death. Similarly, once he realizes that he has not lived as he should have, he becomes aware of how almost everybody around him is repeating the mistakes he made. Again, instead of pitying them the errors of their ways, he hates them for it. (This hatred may stem from the fact that living as they have, they were co-conspirators in his wasting his life. He could not have done it so well without them.)

The move from one's own case to the universal is not an error if one's fate is caused by a property that others also have, and the cause of mortality is such a property. So, the syllogism he grasps is: (1) I am mortal in virtue of being human; (2) they are all human; therefore, (3) they are all mortal. Similarly, if doing x is the wrong way for Ivan to live because it is the wrong way for human persons in general to live, it will be wrong for everyone as well.

If he makes this move from his own case to the universal, the universal has more reality for him than it had when he believed its content only applied to some others, because he now applies it to his inner circle of family and friends who have also (in his thoughts) previously been exempt from death.[8] He also applies it to people to whom (unlike Caius) he attributes a subjectivity, for, in calling them fools, he recognizes their beliefs about themselves that they will not die.

However, there is a slightly different way of interpreting the logical move with which Ivan has no problems. He moves from his own case to the cases of those who he thinks are *like him*—that is, his friends and their deaths become as nonabstract for him as his own. This does not yet generate a true universal from the subjectively real personal and so it does not transmit the force of the personal in order to *de*abstract even the death of Caius. This version of his syllogism is: (1) I, even with my special characteristics, am mortal in virtue of being human; (2) others who share my special characteristics are human; therefore, (3) they are mortal.

Going from his own case to the case of those he can see as like him in many ways (rather than transforming the still too abstract universal) mirrors what happens to his so-called friend, Peter Ivanovich, at the very beginning of the story. Even if Peter, like Ivan, cannot move from Caius and all men to his own case, he can move from Ivan's death to his own. He becomes aware that someone very much like him has died and it could happen to him. Tolstoy implies that this is how death becomes subjectively real to someone who is not yet dying, rather than through the universal syllogism. The death of someone like oneself makes clear that many of the characteristics that one has and Caius lacks cannot save one, since they did not save one's friend who also had them. But there is still a route of escape for someone like Peter, who is not the one dying—he can just rely on his bare particularity to save him, at least for the time being. He says, "I am not Ivan, so he is dead and I am not." The further implicit thought is, "Possibly I won't have to be dead."[9]

A true friend (let alone a clearheaded thinker), however, might not be able to latch onto this separating mechanism. On the one hand, true sympathy draws a friend closer to the person who died so that he thinks more about the bad

thing that has happened to his friend and his own loss of that friend rather than about what all this implies about his own mortality. But, on the other hand, identification with one's friend also reinforces a sense of equality (or perhaps even personal subordination to the friend), so one is more likely to accept a shared fate with one's friend. The thought comes, if it was possible for death to happen even to my beloved friend, why *should* it not be possible that it happen to me?[10]

In addition to his failure to be convinced by the syllogism concerning Caius, Ivan believes that if something as important as his being mortal were true, there would have been some clue to it arising from his own subjectivity, independent of empirical evidence and logical implications from universals. He thinks there would have been an instinctive awareness of his own mortality in the way, we are told, he had instinctive awareness of the right way to live (as evidenced by his initial revulsion at socially approved norms). But as he repressed and ignored these intimations of how to live, he no doubt would have repressed and ignored intimations of mortality had they existed.

Hence, I believe we can agree that the way Ivan lived does explain one characteristic of his death, namely his shock at the fact that it will occur. Tolstoy contrasts Ivan's ignorance on this matter with the open-eyed awareness of death that common folk like Gerasim have, an awareness that they do not repress. Presumably, it is part of their goodness to recognize the reality of others and not think of themselves as remarkable exceptions; this, more than mere logical abilities in dealing with a universal premise, helps explain their knowledge of their own mortality.

II

Closely related to Ivan's shock at the fact that he can die is the second characteristic of his death, namely his shock at how something as important as death can come about at a time of no particular consequence. It need not come from fighting in a battle for some important cause but, rather, from something as trivial as a misstep on a ladder while decorating. It is this that adds one element of the absurd. It also helps explain his disbelief that he will die now—after all, nothing important enough has happened to merit being the cause of his death. Of course, Tolstoy arranges his story so that Ivan's death results from his greed and concern with appearance and trivialities: he hits himself while arranging a curtain in his new home.[11] Would a person who did not live as Ivan had avoid such an absurd end? Good people may also die of missteps, even if not from those produced by (habitual) greed. But, presumably, they realize that an absurd end is possible, and so are not shocked by it. (And they may be continually grateful that something of this sort has not yet happened, given that it always might.) Again, how one lives seems to have some impact on how one dies.[12]

III

Once he knows that he will die, what are the sources of Ivan's fear of death? (I am now speaking only of fear of death, not fear of the process of dying.) There are three: (1) death means no more of the goods of life (*a*) of the type he has been having and (*b*) of new types he might have; (2) it means extinction of himself; and (3) it means that (*a*) he has wasted all the life he had and (*b*) there will be no more chances to rectify that. He first focuses on how he will have no more of the types of goods he has been having (1*a*), then he focuses on extinction (2), but ultimately it is the waste of life and no chance of rectifying this (3) that are his preeminent concerns with death. These are characteristics that Ivan believes his death will have. Ultimately, I am concerned to see if he is right about his own death and whether these characteristics attach to everyone's death. But to begin with, I shall consider the relation between these three characteristics.

Can we really distinguish the badness of having no more goods (1) from the badness of extinction (2)? I believe we can. One common philosophical view of why death is bad is that it interferes with having more goods of life.[13] (These goods might come to us if we lived, even if we have no plans for the future with which death would interfere. The completion of plans is just one sort of good with which death can interfere.) This is certainly one reason why death is bad, and it is involved in (1) and also in no rectification (3*b*). But Ivan is also concerned that *he will be nothing*. (Although he exhibits the inability to grasp the very idea of his own extinction by confusingly asking, "Then where shall I be when I am no more?" [p. 42].)

We can try to distinguish concern for one's extinction from concern that one will not have more goods of life by imagining the Limbo Man.[14] He is someone who could ensure that his life is longer or even never over without thereby increasing the amount of goods (or ills) that he has in his life. He merely selects to spread out his conscious life over an indefinite future, going into unconscious limbo (a coma state) in the intervening times. If this were possible, God could grant someone a much longer life or even immortality without granting him any more goods of life than a mortal being would have. Those whose concern with death is focused only on its limiting total goods will not find the Limbo Man's strategy helpful; those who are concerned with extinction—a conscious self not being all over—should find it helpful.

What leads Ivan to eventually focus on waste and no rectification (3) is really his recognition that avoiding the end of the sort of "goods" he has been having (1*a*) would not be worthwhile in his case.[15] He has been living a bad life—a living death, some have called it[16]—and more of the so-called goods he has been having would just be more of the bad. So, in his case, death is not bad because it prevents a continuation of goods he has been having; if it did only this, it would just prevent more bad things. One way to understand what Ivan realizes as he is dying physically is that he died morally, emotionally, and spiritually a long time ago. (The

most remarkable passages conveying this insight are as follows: "And the longer it lasted the more deadly it became. 'It is as if I had been going downhill while I imagined I was going up. . . . life was ebbing away from me'"; "There is one bright spot there at the back, at the beginning of life, and afterwards all becomes blacker and blacker and proceeds more and more rapidly—in inverse ratio to the square of the distance from death.")[17] This shows us that moral, emotional, and spiritual death can happen to someone without his knowing that it has happened. When Ivan is uncertain whether he is dying physically and no one in his own circle tells him the truth, his brother-in-law comes from outside and says, "Why, he's a dead man! Look at his eyes—there's no light in them" (p. 41). But there was no one in his life who remarked in this way on Ivan's earlier (moral, emotional, and spiritual) death, since this was considered the normal course of events in his circle. This latter type of death and dying process can go undiagnosed for far longer than the physical death, and it is very dangerous for that reason.[18]

If no more of the goods that one has been having (*1a*) were the only reason death is bad, death would not be bad for Ivan. Indeed, if only the *prospect* of death could make someone like Ivan reconsider the life he had been leading in order to see that it had not been right, and the prospect was inseparable from the actual occurrence of death, then the occurrence of death could be at least instrumentally good. That is, in Ivan's case, it is not just that death will rob him of life but that the prospect of death and the process of dying are robbing him of pleasant illusions about his life. This is something we may dread about the process of dying, but it may have good aspects. Still, death would interfere with true goods of life that Ivan could now recognize and might seek if he lived on. So death is bad for reason (*1b*). However, there might be a new type of good with which death need not interfere (and which the prospect of death helps cause): Ivan's final insight or some conversion or rebirth before death. (I shall investigate this possibility in more detail below in discussing the process of dying.)[19] Some people like Ivan may only have good in their lives by dying in the right way, in Tolstoy's view. If they went on living (again, assuming that the prospect of death that might reform a person cannot be separated from death's occurrence), they would only live bad lives, and that would be worse than a good death.

It is because Ivan comes to believe (let us assume correctly) that his life has been trivial and nasty that he thinks death would not interfere with any *goods he has been having*. Nevertheless, death coming now would still imply, if it interferes with his having some future life with real goods, that his whole life had been wasted. Further, as he sees it at one point, it interferes with his *rectifying* his so-far wasted life. (This is the waste and no rectification of [*3a*] and [*3b*].) Indeed, merely not having more future (real) goods seems to take a back seat in Ivan's case to not being able (in having them) to rectify the past or at least rescue his life from being a total waste. If he could have had those future goods, his (extended) life would not have been as much of a waste, and if he could have done certain things in the future, that might have made up for the past or even redeemed the errors of the

past. (*How* future good could make up for the past or even redeem the past is an important question that I shall discuss only briefly below.)

The desire that his life not have been a waste becomes stronger than the desire that he not be extinct or even that he have a future with real goods per se. (One's life not being a waste is a second-order property that supervenes on some of the real goods in it, presumably.)[20] Given that his strongest desire is that his life not have been a waste, *immortality* per se (the absence of death) would not necessarily be a solution to what Ivan fears will be the consequence of death in his case. That is, what he comes to be afraid of most need not go away if he were immortal (and knew this about himself). For one could live immortally a trivial and nasty life. Though there would always be time to make one's life not be a total waste, such a rescue need not necessarily take place. And it would be peculiar to think that if one has only a little bit of life, it matters if one wastes it, but if one has an infinite amount of life, it does not matter if one wastes it. Just because one can never waste it all (there is always more to waste), this does not mean that waste would not matter.

Still, focusing on "waste" can be deceptive. To waste something (e.g., time) is, ordinarily, not to make good use of it. If one thinks of a good life as a product—a fixed amount of good—one could produce that product with more or less waste. For example, if one had a long time in which to produce the fixed amount of good, one might waste a lot of time and still produce the good. If one had a short time in which to produce the fixed amount of good, one could do it if there were less waste. But if it was the product that was important, it might not matter that there was more waste of time in one life than in the other. If one immortally lives badly, there will be not only inefficient squandering of "resources" but also no good product, and it is the absence of the good product that would be the import of saying that someone's life is or was a waste in the sense that he wasted his life. That is, the resources were not used to produce the product.[21]

On the product view of waste, the problem is that you did not produce a product (your life was a waste). On the resource view of waste, the focus is on how many opportunities were squandered. Your life need not have been a waste even though you wasted a lot of it. But neither the "product" nor the "resource" view of waste is completely adequate. This is because it is important how we live each moment—not just that we produce a fixed product. Nor is it true that if we waste a moment of time of which we are to have an infinite number, its loss as a resource is what matters. What is important is that we should have been *living* differently at that point in time. It is important how we live each moment because it is important *that we respond correctly*, all the time, to the value or disvalue of persons, things, and events that surround us and are in us. This is the real reason why the person who lives immortally must still worry about whether his life at each moment is worthwhile.

Hence, it is not true that if there is no death, and one will not be extinguished, and there is no end to the possibility of future real goods, that one need not care,

even continually, about the content of one's life. It is not just that in the absence of immortality one must focus on the secondary, partially compensating good of having lived a mortal life well. It is not correct to think either, "I'm going to live forever; it does not matter how I live," or "So what if it is a waste, *as long as* it will last forever."[22] The latter thought suggests that extinction (2) is the worst part of death and most to be avoided, even at the expense of having a life full of bad things. But Tolstoy's view, I think, is that it would be better to exchange an immortal bad life for a mortal one that has good in it.

The temptation is to read "Ivan Ilych" as though the prospect of death is necessary to make one think about the worth of one's life and the possibility (or necessity) of death is what makes it necessary to live a good life.[23] Such a reading implies that people like Ivan, who do not believe that they will die, will not properly evaluate or take seriously the worth of their lives. But, I have argued, it is not true that it is only if we can die that we should be concerned with the way we are living. It is not because of death that we *need* to be rescued from a worthless life. Nor, I believe, is it true that only if we face the prospect of death will we be concerned with the way we live. There are many events and relationships in life that alert us to the importance of how we live. It is true that Ivan might have needed the prospect of death and (on the supposition that the prospect and reality could not be separated) the reality of death in order to be concerned with the real worth of his life; *he* needs death, on Tolstoy's view, for the opportunity it gives him to be rescued.[24] (How it might do this is investigated in more detail below.) Nevertheless, at the risk of failing to appropriately generalize from Ivan's case, I think that not all who have been living as Ivan has need death or even its prospect in order to be rescued.

It must be admitted, however, that Ivan's case makes one think of an asymmetry in the relation between the worth of one's life and, on the one hand, living and, on the other hand, dying. If one believes that one will be living a trivial life (when one could live a good one), one does not necessarily feel the need to leave life. That is, if one is to *go on living life*, one need not believe that one is going to be living something good. But if we are to leave life, we think that we should *have* lived something good. We may stay on in life without having had, and even without the prospect of having, a justified life (though we should try for a justified life). But we should not leave—we should be locked into life—until we can make something worthwhile of our life (when this is a possibility). So long as we do not close the production, there is not the same need to make a tally of what we have or will produce, in order to go on. But if we are closing the production, we should make a tally. We should not bring the production to an end, eliminating any possibility of future improvement, until there is something sufficiently good left behind. So if we have not had a certain amount of good in our life by t_{10} and even never will, this does not mean that we are not justified in *going on* beyond t_{10}, but not having a certain amount of good might interfere with being reconciled to *not going o.n* beyond t_{10} if goods are possible beyond t_{10}. This asymmetry focuses on the *instrumental role* of living a

worthwhile life: that is, whether we must live it in order to be reconciled to doing something else—either to live on or leave life. Hence, I shall call it the Instrumental Asymmetry.[25]

I have been speaking of Ivan's concern with wasting his life and how waste comes about if one lives a worthless life. In concluding this part of the discussion, I want to emphasize that we should still distinguish the concern with waste (in any of the senses distinguished above) from a concern with the mere worthlessness of one's life for at least one reason: Suppose that one has been living a worthless life but it is the only life possible for human beings. Then there is no wasted life because there was nothing else better to have been done. The idea of a wasted life depends on the possibility of a worthwhile life. If there is no such possibility, rather than fear that death now will make a worthwhile life impossible, the thought of suicide (putting an end to a life that can only be worthless) might be understandable. (This is so, even if suicide is not morally required.) By contrast, if one has been living a worthless life and there is and always was a better alternative, one should at least now try to live that alternative, and death may interfere with doing this. (Just possibly, one might punish oneself for having wasted life so far by committing suicide, rather than altering one's life. This would be the attitude of someone who thought that he did not deserve another chance after what he had wasted so far. Ivan never exhibits this frame of mind.)

Now we come to our continuing question: Would the things that I have said Ivan fears about death be present in the death of a person who had lived as he should (assuming he has lived as long as Ivan)? (I am still speaking only of fear of death, not fear of the process of dying.) Let us consider (1), (2), and (3) from page 7, above. In the death of the person who lived as he should, no more continuation of the sorts of goods he had been having (1*a*) as well as no more new sorts of goods (1*b*) would be present. (This assumes the person would continue to live well.) Indeed, aspect (1*a*) of death would actually be worse in the case of a good person than in Ivan's, since death would prevent the continuation of *real* goods he had been having in the past, not trivial and nasty pursuits. However, the additional real goods to be gotten from living on are not needed as much by the good person as by Ivan, given that the good person will have had many of them already but Ivan will not. This is consistent with the person who has lived as he should deserving the future real goods more than Ivan does. Waste (3) would not be present because the life of a person who lived as he should would not have been a wasted one, nor will rectification be needed. Extinction (2) will be present (or absent) both for those who lived as they should and for those who did not, depending on whether there is a type of life after death for both types of people. Even without life after death, Tolstoy may believe that extinction does not really occur, or at least will not be a bad thing to happen, for someone who lives correctly. This could be partially true if living correctly means investing oneself in others or in values and projects outside oneself. For then extinction could correctly be a minor matter to the person who dies, if he correctly cares most about something other than himself. If

what he correctly cares about most goes on, nothing very important happens to him when he dies. The view that physical death would not involve extinction at all, even if there were no afterlife, is most clearly conveyed in the death of the master in Tolstoy's "Master and Man." The master comes to identify so completely with Nikita his servant that the master thinks that he will live (and so not be extinct) so long as Nikita lives.[26] (Presumably, by transitivity, the master will also live so long as those through whom Nikita lives continue to live.)[27]

It should be noted that focusing on identification with others who go on living ignores another form of detachment from self: identification with those who have already died. Such identification cannot work to correctly reduce one's concern with death by attaching one to continuing life. Rather, it shows that any form of intense identification that makes one think less about oneself and that also makes one willing to share a fate because it has befallen loved ones can reduce to some degree the importance to oneself of one's extinction, perhaps correctly so. Furthermore, identification with those who have died or will die, without identification with others in the future, means one is not hostage to life continuing on. If all life is extinguished, it is enough that there once was worthwhile life. But then, that would be true even if one did not identify with anyone, as it could be enough that there once was a worthwhile life and it was one's own.

As I see it, Tolstoy's view of how to live correctly is meant to eliminate or diminish the importance of extinction (2) and waste and no rectification (3) as characteristics of death even if there were no afterlife, and to diminish the significance of no more goods (1).

IV

What of the process of dying that Ivan lives through, aside from death itself? Ivan is a judge by profession and my interpretation of the penultimate part of the story is that in his process of dying, Ivan is putting himself on trial. (From a religious perspective, God will be one's ultimate judge. But it may be that until one believes in that judgment, one's own judgment of oneself is especially crucial.) However, as I see it, there are two trials that Ivan puts himself through which should be distinguished (though Tolstoy never explicitly says this). The initial trial begins when an inner voice that seems separate from Ivan questions him, and he responds. ("'What is it you want?' . . . 'To live . . .' 'How?' . . . 'as I used to . . . '"[28]) The inner voice is like an impartial judge who prompts Ivan to testify in his own case and leads him to see truths about his life (that I have discussed in section III).

Suppose that a trial shows that one has not lived as one should have, one comes to realize it, and one is dying. What should one do? At one point, as we have seen, Ivan believes that he is in this situation, that he has lost out on everything worth having and there is no possibility of rectification. This is when he suffers extreme mental agony. If he were to die, the agony would end. So perhaps suicide

or at least wishing for death is what he ought to do. After all, his belief that his life has been wrong and that there is no rectification possible cause him agony. So why should he still fear death, as it will end this agony? Why does he not see death as a release from agony? This is the question with which I shall be concerned here.

For one thing, Ivan still fears extinction (2), which he envisions as "the black hole." When he is in a position to see the truth about his past life and suffer from it, he is also in a position to see other truths—for example, that extinction is really coming. Rather than accept these two truths, he struggles against them both. But, Tolstoy says, Ivan resists death at this point *because* he tries again to justify his past life, rather than because he is concerned with extinction per se. Hence there are two patterns that are candidates to represent what is going on after the first trial ends in a verdict that he has lived badly. In pattern 1, Ivan is in agony from his awareness of the truth about his life. He could avoid this agony by dying, but he fears the black hole. This leads him to find another route to avoid the agony: reexamine his verdict about his life in the hope that it is wrong. In pattern 2, though he is afraid of the black hole in itself, he is primarily afraid of dying without being able to justify and find the worth of his life. In pattern 2, changing his beliefs about his life is not a necessary alternative if he is to be able to stay alive without agony instead of going into the hole. Rather, changing his beliefs about his life is necessary if he is to be able to reconcile himself *to going* into the dreaded hole.

Pattern 2 is a more accurate representation of Ivan's state of mind, I think. Ivan resists death totally because he feels he cannot die until he knows that his life was good. Ivan is a judge by profession, but possibly everyone will put himself on trial and resist leaving until he knows that his life has been good. *Tolstoy is warning us that when someone must die, his primary concern will not be with death per se but with how he has lived his life.* (I shall consider below whether a trial is necessarily a part of the dying process of a person who has lived as he should.) If Tolstoy is right, then if one is offered an ignoble means of avoiding death on one occasion, one should remember that so long as one remains mortal, one will eventually come to be concerned more with having used those ignoble means than with the temporary continuation of life that their use made possible.

However, according to Tolstoy, Ivan's double *resistance*—to the truth about his death and to the truth about his life—actually causes more suffering than the *awareness* of the two truths. The most suffering now is caused by not getting into the black hole in the right way, and what impedes getting in the right way is the attempt to justify his past life. Ivan has a device in him (the inner voice) that has gotten him to the truth but he lacks, as yet, anything that helps stabilize him in the face of the truth. If we interpret all this in the light of the trial metaphor, we can see that Ivan is now in a second trial in an Appeals Court. He is appealing the initial verdict that his life was no good. The problem is that at this second stage he is no longer responsive to an impartial element inside himself. He is trying to bend the truth so that he gets a result more pleasing to himself. The defense, not an impartial judge, is running the appeals trial.

What someone in Ivan's situation should be doing, according to Tolstoy, is at least dying right if he could not live right. But Ivan is not doing this either, and that becomes a further source of his suffering. The problem is not that his dying process includes the first trial, it is how he reacts to its verdict. We should, I think, be more precise about the two trials. Consider figure 1.1.

		Belief about Life: Good	Belief about Life: Not Good
Life	Good	Knowledge	Deception
	Not Good	Deception	Knowledge

FIGURE 1.1

This figure shows that there are two dimensions: what one's life was actually like and what one believes about it. To *know* that one's life was good, it must actually have been good and one must have something like a justified belief that it was good. (Figure 1.1 cuts corners as it does not represent the element of justification of one's belief.) But one's life could be good without one knowing this. There is a difference between (*a*) refusing to leave life because one's life has not been good (and one knows it), (*b*) refusing to leave life because one does not know whether it has been good or bad, and (*c*) refusing to leave life until one knows that one's life has been good. Let me try to make the significance of these distinctions clearer.

The Instrumental Asymmetry discussed earlier (page 11) says that one's life should have amounted to something worthwhile before one is ready to leave (or to be reconciled to leaving). But according to the Instrumental Asymmetry, if the life was good, it will be acceptable to leave and to be reconciled to leaving, whether one knows that it was good or not. One's life will have either been good or not been good, independent of one's beliefs or knowledge of it. Knowing that one's life has been good can arguably make one's life better.[29] But resisting death in order to evaluate one's life (by having a first trial) will not, by itself, make it have been a good life. In particular, if the life was not good, resistance to its ending in order to know that it was not good will not make it be a good life. So, it might be said, why not end the agony of worrying about whether one's life was good, skip the trials, and just die?

The answer to this may be that even a bad life has a good component added to it if one knows the truth about oneself, at least if one has an appropriate reaction to this truth, for example, not joy but sadness or even agony. On this view, Ivan's life is more worthwhile because he responds with agony to the verdict. That his life becomes more worthwhile does not, of course, mean that it is necessarily an experientially better life for him to live. (This is one reason why, though it could be wrong to interfere with painful personal growth when it is spontaneously in progress, one would not necessarily encourage it when it is not spontaneous.) Further, the Instrumental Asymmetry says that it makes sense to resist the ending of a

production when it has been bad, even though one may go on living if the production has been and will be bad. But in order to know whether one should resist in this way, one needs to know whether one's life really was bad (and might still be good). This is one reason to hold the first trial and not just let death come, letting the chips fall where they may based on the actual merit of one's life, independent of one's knowledge of its merit. So the strategy suggested by the Instrumental Asymmetry is to resist death to gain knowledge about one's life, in order to know whether one should resist further so as not to leave before making one's life worthwhile.

However, at the Appeals Stage, Ivan is not resisting death for these reasons. In particular, he is not resisting because he has not yet done a tally or because he knows that his life has been bad and it must not end in this state. Rather, he is resisting death because he is busy appealing the initial verdict. He wants to be able to prove that his life was good, even though if it were good it would not really matter very much for the acceptability of his leaving that he know it. (So he is not thinking that he must know whether his life was bad in order to resist death if his life was bad.)

Why is it important to him to know that his life was good? His most important concern is that his life actually have been good. If the knowledge that the life was good were not only a component of a good life but a necessary component, he would have to know that it is good in order for his life to be good. But such knowledge does not seem necessary for the life to be good. Still, it seems quite understandable to want to know if what one most wanted to happen did happen, and it can also make the good life better to know it was good. So Ivan's case shows that we not only want our life to have been good, but in the end we will want to know that it was good before we can leave in peace. (Yet, the desire to know is still a separable desire, as shown by the fact that one could want to know even if one did not care to make one's life better by knowing. This is also shown by the fact that if someone wants to know whether x is so, primarily because he is concerned that x be so, he should be willing to make the following bargain: decrease the probability of his knowing that x is so, if this will increase the probability that x is so.)

Ivan's case has another element in it, however. If he does not get the knowledge that his life was good, he will not just be without any beliefs about his life. He has already had a verdict in the first court, and this verdict says that his life was bad. He is in agony. He wants the agony to end. He might end it by thinking, "The verdict could be wrong. What I most want is that it be wrong, not that I know that it is wrong. My knowing will not affect whether it was wrong or not, so I'll forget about knowing." But if Ivan has done a careful tally the first time, he needs more than the possibility that it might be wrong to end the agony. He needs evidence that it was wrong in order to end the agony. Or alternatively, as mentioned above, if he died, the agony would end as well. But he—and presumably we all—would want agony from our doubts about our life to be relieved by knowledge of the worth of our lives, not just by death that terminates our ability to agonize. If Ivan were to know that his life is good, the state of affairs (i.e., the goodness of his life) with whose existence he is concerned would be a cause of his knowledge of it, and

through this knowledge be a cause of his agony stopping. By contrast, if his agony stops because he dies, this has nothing to do with that which he most wants to be true—that he had a good life—being true. So the primary reason why death is not an appropriate escape from his agony about his life is not that he fears the black hole. It is that he primarily wants his agony to be *unjustified* by the facts about his life, and dying cannot make that be the case. He wants the agony to go away because he comes to know that his life has been worthwhile, and dying cannot make this so.

However, if we want to have the good news on Appeal, we also risk getting bad news instead, namely that one's life was not any good. And according to the Instrumental Asymmetry, this should set up a resistance to dying. But this is not what happens to Ivan, in part because in his case resistance is useless; he must die now. What actually happens after Appeal shows that there is another way to react to the knowledge of the badness of one's life besides resisting death, and another reason—besides resisting death (if the life is bad), quenching curiosity, or ending agony—to try to get the knowledge about the goodness or badness of one's life before dying. This additional reason is related to what has already been said about self-knowledge adding a worthwhile component to a bad life, but it goes beyond it. For those who do not have the option of not leaving life, knowledge can make some rectification possible when it seemed too late for rectification. Here we are also broaching the issue of how Ivan can be rescued.

What happens to Ivan is that something outside of his will pushes him closer to death, and death turns out to involve meeting not a black hole but a light of revelation.[30] The revelation involves a permanent commitment to the truth that his life was not lived correctly. It also involves the correction of a *mistaken* belief that caused a great measure of his suffering: that there was no more possibility of rectifying the waste of his life. If he does not resist two truths—about the lack of worth of his past life and about death being irresistible—the third belief (no possibility of rectification) turns out not to be true at all. So if he had not come to know and accept that his life was bad, there could not have been this possibility of rectification.

The rectification comes not merely in dying without resistance to the truth about himself. For him to accept without any backsliding that his life was wrong is for him to permanently accept a new set of values according to which his life fails. So it involves leaving behind the values of the old Ivan. One sign of this is his showing pity and love for others; indeed, dying for their sake. "He was sorry for them, he must act so as not to hurt them: release them and free himself from these sufferings."[31] So if one has lived badly, and one comes to realize both this and that one is dying, the thing to do is to immediately do whatever it is right to do *now*, for example, ask forgiveness, care for the welfare of others, and so on. When he says, "Yes, it was all not the right thing . . . but that's no matter,"[32] one thing he presumably means is that it does not matter now, since it does not stand in the way of doing what it is right to do now.[33] It is correct to focus on whether one's life is right when one can still make one's life (including one's death) better by doing that, or

perhaps even to just have the knowledge. After this, continuing to focus on it is self-indulgent. The importance of Ivan's coming to know the truth about himself may seem connected to a version of the view that the unexamined life is not worth living, namely that the unexamined life is not worth dying. But the unexamined life can be well worth living or dying, as it can be life full of good thoughts and good deeds. And, in the end, I think Ivan's story shows instead that commitment to and action on correct values is a higher good than self-knowledge.[34]

Indeed, on Tolstoy's view, the good person's dying process may include a far more cursory "trial" than the bad person's, suggesting that reflecting on one's good life is not as necessary as ferreting out faults, and that being good allows one to forget about self-knowledge. There is an interesting comparison to be made between the trial Ivan puts himself through and its resolution, and a much shorter trial that a Tolstoyean good person, Nikita, puts himself through when he thinks that he is dying.[35] He too reviews his life. When he finds a fault, he does not torture himself with it—he says that God will forgive him as he made him to be the way he is. We might say that this is letting oneself off too easily, but it is very similar to the attitude Ivan eventually takes toward the deeper faults of his own life, which is the other aspect of his saying, "Yes, it was all not the right thing . . . but that's no matter."[36]

When Ivan commits himself to his new values, he still feels physical pain but loses his fear of death. He claims that this is because death does not exist. How may we interpret this? One interpretation is that when he shows pity for his son and wife and thinks about their welfare rather than his own, he is able to identify with others and forget about himself. Then personal extinction is not significant enough to give rise to fear. Indeed, identification can be so complete that one believes that one lives through others who remain. If this belief were literally true, there would be no death.

A somewhat different interpretation of why he says that there is no death is that by becoming someone with different values who casts off his past self, he does not die when his old self dies. From his point of view, he has just passed through a "death" already. It may be because he has self-transcended in this way that he also says that death is over. But also keep in mind what was said above: Ivan discovers that he died morally, emotionally, and spiritually a long time ago, so when he shakes off his old self, he is also shaking off his living death. In this sense, too, death is over.

Tolstoy emphasizes how short the period of time is in which Ivan is aware of an important positive truth about life, and also that he never again is unaware of that truth. He latches on to it and is held, as if mesmerized. The duration is of less importance than the completeness of absorption and its permanence while he lives. Wittgenstein said that if by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present. Because Ivan comes to live so completely in the moment, he may think that there is no death. For if our *sense* of time moving on (to death) is a function of felt changes

taking place, then constancy gives rise to the sense that time is not passing and that this moment will never end. Hence, looked at secularly, Ivan may say that there is no death because he is so engrossed in the experience of his new insight and new nature that he is subject to a new illusion, namely that he in his new state will not die. (Of course, if part of the white light experience is being privy to the truths of Christianity, that God exists and there is everlasting spiritual life, then there would be no illusion.)

We can conclude, I think, that there are really three deaths of Ivan Ilych: his moral, emotional, and spiritual death that happened long ago; the death of his old self (accompanied by a rebirth); and his physical death.

V

Is Ivan's struggle worthwhile? He has the time to minimally act as his new self—pitying his child and wife, trying to ask for forgiveness (which is important, even though he does not successfully communicate with those he intends to reach). But since there is not much time to act as his new self, the joy he feels may come from simply *being* the new type of person. (Of course, it may also come from the new relationship he [believes that he] begins in his new identity, that with God whose understanding he comes to believe in.)[37] He dies in triumph. Unlike the trials he has presided over in his life, a firm self-imposed judgment of "guilty as charged" does not lead to punishment. (Ivan's is a triumph that none of those who hear of his agony knows about or would understand. His friend fears that he will have an end like Ivan's, but of course, there could be endings that are much worse. This is a point to which I shall return below.)

If we abstract from the issue of entering into a life after death, the story can be taken to imply that it is worth a great struggle to come to have a good will or to know an important truth about the meaning of life, even if one does not have the opportunity to live in accord with that will or truth. This change allows one to reject and detach from the bad life one leaves behind as a new person. But looked at in one way, the change at the end of Ivan's life amounted to only a few good thoughts taking place in a brief minute. How could this be worth a great struggle? Suppose that such thoughts in one minute occurred somewhere in the course of his life, not at its end, and then were followed by his old way of being. Would they count for much? If such knowledge occurs at the end of one's life, does it have greater importance? I believe that where in a life story some event occurs can be important because the pattern of one's life can be important. (This pattern, however, is something that should come about because of what one does for reasons other than trying to achieve a pattern.) For example, it is better to start off badly in life and head toward improvement than to start off well and head toward decline, even when we hold constant all the nonpattern goods and bads that are distributed in the two different patterns.[38]

Why might this be? Among the factors that could be at work[39] are, first, that our ideal of rational change involves not moving from a current position unless we move somewhere as good or better. Given this, if one wants to keep on living, and in that sense move somewhere, we should move to an equally good or better state. Second, decline within life suggests vulnerability, of both a higher state and of retention of what one has. Ending on a high point within life means that only death, not change in life itself, ends a better state. I think that these two factors are plausible components of an explanation of the importance of incline versus decline within life. Less plausible is a third suggestion: you most likely are what you end up being. (This seems to conflict with the fact that someone's identity as a genius is secure even if he ends senile.) However, if Ivan's true nature were what he is at the end, the question would arise of why it is more important to end as one's true self than to have been it at some earlier point. The first two factors could provide answers.

David Velleman suggests that a life on an incline is better than one on a decline only if the good is caused by, and so in some way redeems, the bad. For example, he thinks that a bad start in a marriage is redeemed by what one learns from it to make the marriage better later. By contrast, a bad marriage followed by winning the lottery is not preferable, he thinks, to winning the lottery followed by a bad marriage.[40] I disagree with Velleman. First, it seems to me that the incline is preferable even when there is no causal relation between the bad and the good, as when one wins a lottery after a bad marriage. Second, I do not think that the redemption of the bad by the good could be the explanation of the importance of the upward trajectory of a life. For imagine that one had a crystal ball that allowed one to see the bad mistakes that one will commit in the future as one goes into a decline (Crystal Ball Case). One could, at present, redeem the future decline by acting on one's foreknowledge so as to improve one's present from what it would otherwise have been, to the same extent as one could redeem one's bad past by using it for future good. But the fact that in the Crystal Ball Case the bad future is at least partially redeemed does not alter the relative badness of a declining rather than an inclining life, I think. Hence, inclines are better than declines even when redeeming the bad is held constant.

The Crystal Ball Case could also be used to criticize another hypothesis about why an incline toward a good character is better than a decline from a good character, holding all other events in the life constant. The proposal is that good at the end happens in response to everything else in the life, whereas an early peak cannot have the same significance because it is not a response to everything in the life. But if someone at the beginning of his life looked into the crystal ball and responded to this by becoming good, that good stage would be a response to everything else in the life. Yet the inclining life is still, I think, preferable to the declining one.

The pattern of Ivan's life (according to his description of it, plus our sense of its end) is illustrated in figure 1.2.

FIGURE 1.2

Notice that figure 1.2 not only describes a life that ended on an upturn but also describes a life in which there is a radical reversal—from a relative and absolute low point to a great peak. (Indeed, the figure might be more accurate if the end point were the highest point in his life.) Hence, Ivan's life is not on an incline in the standard sense. This may raise problems for the ideal-of-rational-change explanation of the good of inclines that I have offered. For consider figure 1.3. At least quantitatively, there seems to be more rational change in a life represented by it than in a life represented by figure 1.2. It is only the last part of the life in figure 1.3 that is radically inconsistent with rationally justified change (given that the decline is from a great high to a great low) and only the last part in figure 1.2 that is consistent with rationally justified change (given that the rise is from a great low to a great high).

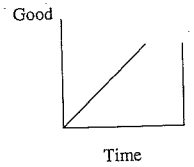

FIGURE 1.3

Suppose figure 1.2 is still preferable to figure 1.3, or at least that more weight is given to how one ends up (while one is still a competent individual) than to other parts of one's life. This would suggest that an explanation of the significance of how one ends must involve more than the ideal-of-rational-change explanation suggests. The second factor, which focuses on what happens prior to nonexistence brought about by death, emphasizing that a great good is not being diminished within life but only by the end of life, should play a greater role in an explanation.[41]

However, I do not think that the mere fact that the life ends on an up note, even as the effect of a big reversal, would always be important enough to merit Ivan's struggle. It is when the brief-lived upturn represents a *stable* change of character or heart, rather than merely an event in someone's life story with whose reversal death interferes, that the brief upturn is worth the struggle. It would amount to achieving the good will that Kant said had incomparable value even if circumstances prevented any actions from being undertaken with it.[42] The worth of Ivan's struggle might then depend on the intrinsic, nonconsequentialist value of being a certain sort of person. By contrast, if a change had occurred earlier in his

life's trajectory, but his character or values then declined again, the change would not have been stable. Stability goes beyond the genuineness of a new insight on how to live. If his altered views on the value of his life were merely genuine, they would not necessarily be more stable than the genuine feelings of sympathy for him that Ivan's wife has when he dies, feelings that do not last even until his funeral. If the few seconds at the end of his life represent a stable turning toward the good, they are more than just good components in a bad life; they could be called salvation, even if they do not make his life as a whole a good one.[43]

Stability, however, implies that if Ivan *had* lived on, he would not have reverted to his old views and way of life. But can we really believe that when placed back in his ordinary family and professional life, he would have thought, felt, and acted differently? And if we cannot believe this, are we left with only the first two proposed explanations—rational change and no reversal within life—of the importance of his brief understanding being at the end rather than somewhere in the middle of his life?

To answer this last question, perhaps it will help to consider the case of someone who foresees that in the future he will change his values and behave *for the worse* (while still being a competent agent). He might take steps now while he still can to prevent that change in himself, even taking the extreme of ending his life in order to prevent the downturn. In this case, the hold on him of his higher values is unstable, but they are nevertheless controlling in that they determine whether he lives on to live by worse values. In this case, even without stability of the good values, the fact that the worse values were prevented from coming on the scene makes the life better. In Ivan's case, of course, his new values were not employed to help halt his life; he just dies in the midst of his conversion. But suppose one believes that Ivan *would* have, while in his converted state, turned his back on future life if he knew that he would revert to his old ways. Achieving such a set of controlling values in his conversion makes his struggle worthwhile, even if we cannot believe that he achieves stable new values. In addition, there is the element of the actual trajectory. Unlike the person who in his midlife conversion *would have* interfered with his reversion had he foreseen it coming, but did not foresee it, Ivan has the luck to end without a decline within life.

A somewhat different way of understanding conversions that it is reasonable to think would not last is to think of them as stable in some but not all circumstances. Some people may be capable of being aware of what is really important only in a certain narrow range of conditions—for example, in a hermit's retreat. (If they will forget when they leave that circumstance, perhaps they should not leave.) Some people may only achieve the awareness when they are completely detached from daily life, and forget and act badly in daily life. If you will behave badly in every circumstance but one, arguably you should stay in that one circumstance. If being at the point of death—however long one stays there—is the only circumstance in which someone has it in him to realize what is worthwhile and act from that knowledge, then struggling to get there, not struggling to get away from there

(and even struggling to not get away), may be right. We can say that Ivan found the place in which he could instantiate his better nature, and while it would be a shame if he could not go back to ordinary life retaining his insights, it is also a shame that he cannot stay in his special place longer.

Of course, a change in a person need not be all or nothing. Few can take back to daily life the perspective they have on a "high mount," but the experience can nevertheless color ordinary life. And it is not so hard to believe that such a partial stable change might have happened to Ivan had he lived. Prince Andrei, in *War and Peace*, feels very much that the sort of love he finds when dying detaches one from life, even though it solves the mystery of life. It is not the sort of love for a particular person (Natasha) that would take him over again if he lived on. Yet, even in his case, when he temporarily "returns" to life, his most detached perspective has its effect on his relations with particular people. For example, it makes possible his forgiveness of Natasha.

Hence, Ivan's life is saved, if he has become the sort of person (in the product sense described earlier, page 9) that one should be in life, or has achieved good controlling values, even if he cannot live his life as this sort of person or with these values because death cuts short his life. Less plausibly, Ivan's life is saved merely because he sees a truth and never again fails not to see it because it is placed at the end of a trajectory. His life may also be saved in the sense that something happens in it that is important enough to compensate for the bad that is also in it (and this could be true even of someone who sees the truth in midlife but forgets it). Ivan has wasted much of his life, but his life is not therefore a waste.

However, seeing the light, a stable or partial transformation of character, or commitment to good controlling values would still not imply that Ivan's life as a whole was good. Indeed, just as we can correctly punish a criminal who has reformed from his past crimes, Ivan remains accountable for his past mistakes (unless his past mistakes are forgiven by God). Possibly, his past is partially redeemed because it serves as the opportunity for reflection that transforms his values. Ivan's new insights, after all, do not come from reading a book but from learning from his mistakes.[44] And because of his change, he is able to detach from and disown much of his past life, even if he is responsible for it. In this sense, he is rescued *from* his past life.[45]

VI

How does the way Ivan lived relate to other bad things in his process of dying besides the trials? Is it true that these would be different for someone who had lived as he should have? One of the bad things for Ivan is his experiencing fear of death, a reasonable response to awareness of the bad properties of death itself (described in section III above). (Had Ivan died in a coma, his death would still have these bad properties, but he would have no fear of them during the dying process.) In addition, there is his loneliness that results from those around him not being honest with him about his impending death and the pretense that he must act out in their presence. (The story is remarkably modern in its view that honesty with the dying is important.) He desperately misses honesty, understanding, and pity.[46]

If he had lived as he should have, he would not have feared death in the same way he does because, I have argued, death would not have had all the same bad properties. If he had lived as he should have *and* others had lived as they should have—an important second condition—he would not have lived a superficial life in which knowledge was repressed and honest feelings were not expressed between *equals*. Then his family, friends, and colleagues could more freely have given what he desires when he is dying. Furthermore, he could accept these things from them. As it is, when his friends and wife do show him pity, he rejects it. He can only accept pity from Gerasim, not a social equal and not a "citified" servant but someone who readily admits that Ivan is dying and accepts that everyone—including himself—will die.

There are at least three possible qualifications to this answer. First, Tolstoy's description of the death of people who lived (as he thought) correctly does not involve their asking for pity or needing much support through a difficult dying process. For them, Tolstoy thinks, the process is not difficult. They neither pity themselves nor desire to be pitied, though they may need physical help and wish not to be abandoned.[47] Hence, living the sort of life that made honesty and deep feelings possible and expressible would not necessarily give Ivan what he now wants (to be babied and pitied), since he might then not want this. Indeed, it seems that it is Tolstoy's ideal that someone who has lived as he should quickly resigns himself to impending death and only wants to continue as long as he can to do the things that gave value to his life.[48]

Second, Tolstoy says that Gerasim treated Ivan as Gerasim hoped that he would be treated when his time came. He wills a certain sort of treatment universally, a form of Kantian or Golden Rule universalization. But the story also describes another form of concern for a dying person, and the question arises whether this other type of concern is even more laudable. It comes from those who do not openly recognize that they will die—for example, Ivan's son and even his wife who also represses awareness of her mortality. Both of these people, at Ivan's end, pity him from love. Is this inferior to or does it surpass Gerasim's universalizable maxim? The problem with concern from love is that it can be unstable. Tolstoy shows us at the very beginning of the story that once Ivan is dead, his wife recalls only how his agony interrupted her peace of mind and how his death mars her financial future.

Yet, there are two different ways to interpret the alternations in Ivan's wife. (1) Even someone who can have such a genuine feeling as sympathy from love is capable of the deepest hatred and self-absorption. (The former leads her to wish for her husband's death long before he is ill. The latter leads her to think only of herself immediately after his death.) She will act on these negative impulses in the

absence of a steadying principle. This is the Kantian side of Tolstoy, insofar as he thinks that reliance on emotions is insufficient for appropriate behavior. But seen in reverse, all this becomes: (2) Even someone who is bad enough to wish from hatred that her husband die and to think only of herself after his death can still have an honest feeling of sympathy from love in response to his death. In this sense, Ivan's death also brings his wife back to emotional (and some might say even moral) life in relation to him. There is a power in the good emotion (even in the absence of a principle that guides it) that can overcome the bad emotions.[49]

Third, it is true that we all die, but we do not all die at the same time. If we are not synchronized in this way, this makes it possible for some to help others in need; but it also means that some will be engaged in living while others are dying. Perhaps those who are dying and know what the dying are going through can make the end of their lives more worthwhile by consoling and supporting each other as well.

VII

So far, I have tried to contrast death and dying in those who have and have not lived correctly (at least as Tolstoy sees it, given his substantive view about what correctness is). I have done this by considering cases of individuals who go through what might be called a "complete" dying process, fully conscious, competent, and so on. In Ivan's case, there is, let us suppose, justifiable agony (an appropriate reaction to reality), followed by a (let us suppose) real triumph. In the case of the person who lived right, we may have justifiable peace all the way through. The life is a triumph, but there is no dramatic return of the lost sheep to the fold.

However, not everybody who lived correctly or incorrectly will go through a complete dying process. Indeed, many people would prefer their deaths to be sudden and unexpected. (This assumes that they have taken care of practical matters and that a sudden death does not deprive them of much quality time alive that they would have had in a prolonged dying.) There is a modern school of thought, however, that speaks of the dying process as an important stage in life. This suggests that no one should skip it if he can, going straight from normal activity to death. But is it necessary to be aware of and cope with all impending bad things, such as death, that will happen to one? Suppose that we find someone on the point of a sudden death and there are two ways to save him: either so that he has his dying process (decline, awareness of a bad that will happen, and coping with it) or so that he continues for the same period of time to live well without any indication of impending death, followed by a sudden death. I do not think that it would always be wrong to choose the second option. If so, a dying process is not a stage that no one should skip. The smaller the amount of ordinary life that one should give up in order to go through the dying process, the less important the process is shown to be.

Still, these judgments are consistent with a dying process being a good thing that one gives up in order to get something even better. The dying process would be shown to have actual negative value if people would be reasonable to give up time alive with knowledge of impending death but with no other negatives in it (e.g., pain) in order to die suddenly sooner. That is, they are imagined to reasonably say "no, thank you" to more time alive, just because it is accompanied by this knowledge of, and need to cope with, impending death. This negative value might be overridden, however, if coping would lead to self-knowledge or good moral change. After all, if sudden death had happened to Ivan, he would never have experienced his self-understanding and conversion. On this assumption, let us consider which sort of dying—sudden or prolonged—is really preferable for the two types of people, those who have lived wrong (Wrong) and those who have lived right (Right).[50] I shall argue that prolonged dying is more important for Wrong than for Right, and also that what Right stands to lose if he has a prolonged dying is less important than what Wrong stands to lose if he has a sudden death. So if we are not sure whether we are Wrong or Right, it might be reasonable to opt for a prolonged dying, though we are not required to.

Consider Nonconscious Ivan who either dies or goes into a coma immediately after he bangs himself while decorating. There is no agony but also no truth and no triumph. Ex post (i.e., once one knows how things will turn out for Ivan), one can think that Ivan is better off than Nonconscious Ivan. Now imagine Totally Agonized Ivan, who will go through agony at the realization of the truth about himself but will never have a triumph, dying in agony. (For example, he dies before or during what I have described as his Appeal.) If we should pity even people who lived wrongly, we should prefer that someone have Nonconscious Ivan's fate rather than Agonized Ivan's. Yet Agonized Ivan's life seems a more worthwhile one; it involves coming to recognize both what has value and an important truth about his life. It is just that the more worthwhile life (seen from outside that life) may be worse for the person to live through.[51] Ex ante, when we know that Ivan is in mental agony but do not know whether Ivan will triumph or just be Totally Agonized, we may be tempted to cut short the spontaneous process of awakening that he is going through, giving precedence to avoiding the pain the person is going through.[52] We could do this by letting him die or by giving him drug-induced artificial relief. (Untruthfully trying to convince him that he really had a wonderful, meaningful life is problematic for many reasons.) We would be trying to prevent the worst experience for the person (represented by Totally Agonized Ivan) rather than taking a chance that a triumph will happen. However, it might be wrong to do this so long as there is a chance for triumph, though the probability of triumph could be relevant. Indeed, if Totally Agonized Ivan were about to expire naturally, we might appropriately try to keep him alive longer (if this were not contrary to his wishes), if there is a good chance that he will reach the final resolution that Ivan does.

A third alternative character, Miserable Ivan, would die in agony not through realization of a truth about *his life* but by coming to know the truth about the death of a loved one or from a purely physical pain. Here, shielding the person from the truth or providing drug-induced relief seems appropriate, for it is not a matter of forestalling a positive resolution to his own life. Finally, consider Deceived Ivan, who has a dying process in which he never realizes the sad truth about himself, and dies happy with the life he has led, though unhappy with death. Unless it is very important that someone live through the awareness that he is dying per se, Nonconscious Ivan's fate might be preferable to Deceived Ivan's, for the latter's happiness is just the product of a mistaken considered judgment and continued self-deception.

What about someone who has lived as he should—Right? If he dies immediately or goes into a coma, he loses the opportunity to live with an awareness of dying and he is unable to evaluate his life. Suppose that he would evaluate it correctly. We think that he then misses at least something good due to the immediate death or coma. But the good is not the important good of correcting one's values and then transcending one's bad past. And what if he misevaluates his life? That is, he will, for the first time, think that he had a bad life when it was really good and he will die in unrelieved agony from this.[53] This seems worse than the immediate death. Indeed, it seems more of a bad thing that someone who lived correctly should die thinking he failed than it is a good thing that someone who lived correctly should come to know this truth through the dying process. If we are uncertain which would happen, therefore, it seems reasonable to prefer the immediate death in the case of the person who lived as he should.

There is also the possibility that a "good" person might, while still mentally competent, undergo a sincere reversal of values—bemoaning the fact that he did not live in what is in fact a bad way.[54] Should we prefer sudden death for someone who at least seems to be good because it forecloses this possibility? Above, we considered the person who knows that his character or values will deteriorate and he prefers to end his life before this happens. It seems better that such a deterioration *not* take place even if it means that some important flaw in the character of the "good" person is never revealed.

It turns out that those who did not live correctly can need a full dying process more than those who lived as they should. But there is a catch: What if we do not know whether someone has lived correctly or incorrectly? (If it is the principle that lies behind one's conduct that determines the answer, it will be especially hard to know the answer.) Using figure 1.1 and repeating a bit of what was said above can help us decide whether going through the dying process stage is better when we are uncertain about our life and character. It is important that Wrong come to know the truth and rise above it. It may be worth risking his dying while deceived or agonized if there is a real possibility (or sufficiently high probability) of a good change. It is important that Right not die deceived that his life was bad, and even more important that he not make a sincere reversal to evil. It is not as important that he die knowing about the goodness of his life. But it is much more important that Wrong know the truth and rise above it than that Right avoid deception. Deception may be painful but it will not turn Right's life into a failure, while Wrong's transformation can prevent a disaster.

We are left with the relative weights of Right turning toward evil and Wrong turning toward good. If each of these turnings would be due to the free choice of the person, then it seems wrong for someone who is uncertain of his own character to direct that there be an interference with his free choice, a choice that might lead to good if he is Wrong, in order to protect himself from a bad choice if he is Right. (This is consistent with his preferring an interference with his future choice for bad when there is nothing good to be weighed against this interference.)[55]

Hence, if we are unsure whether we (or the people we are dealing with) are Right or Wrong, a prolonged conscious dying seems better than sudden death after all.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Ethics* 113 (January 2003): 202–33.

2. For comments on earlier versions of this chapter, I am grateful to Richard Arneson, Derek Parfit, John Richardson, Thomas Scanlon, members of the Stanford Ethics Group, the Department of Philosophy, University of California at San Diego, students in my graduate class at Harvard University, and the editors of *Ethics*. This chapter was written while I was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, supported by Mellon grant 2986639 and AHRQ/NEH Fellowship grant FA-36625-01.

3. Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Ilych," trans. Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude, in *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Short Stories* (New York: Dover, 1993). In brief, this is the way Ivan lived. He conformed to the social code, having a profession, a wife, and a family, but he was driven by concern for social and professional climbing, had no deep feelings for others, enjoyed having power over them, and got pleasure from superficial pursuits. We may not agree that everything was *all* wrong with his mature years. For example, he was an incorruptible judge. This should count for something positive, at least if the laws he applied had any justice in them. One may even argue that the real pleasure he took in his last interior decoration project can be defended. However, when Tolstoy has Ivan say that his life was *all* not right, Tolstoy may have in mind that the *reasons* why Ivan did even the useful acts in his life were wrong. That is, the principle (or maxim) of his conduct was competitive social climbing. Tolstoy would then be suggesting that when we judge our lives, we focus on the maxim at the root of it, rather than on mere behavior. But surely it would be correct to feel better about a life in which we did not kill someone (due to an accidental intervention) than one in which we did, even if the deep maxim in each life that led us to act as we did was equally wrong. This is the problem of moral luck. Even if this were true, we should remember that Tolstoy's point is that someone who was not a bad person in the most obvious

criminal way can still have a remarkably worthless life. Since most people are not criminals, this makes Ivan's story of greater relevance to us.

4. Perhaps a Christian would not have the first impulse. After all, original sin is thought to account for why we all die.

5. Not in the sense that Epicurus thought that death could not happen to him—i.e., when death was present, he was not, and when he was present, death was not.

6. Tolstoy, "Ivan Ilych," p. 44.

7. "Ivan Ilych" can be read, in part, as a primer on professional ethics.

8. It is bizarre that Ivan thinks that they all were immune from death, given that Tolstoy says that several of Ivan's children had already died. However, this may also be an indication of how distant he was from his own children; for if they were as abstract for him as Caius, it is no surprise that he does not include them in the circle of those who cannot die. (Perhaps the frequency of death in pre-antibiotic times required one to put it out of one's mind?) The fact that others in his circle were taken by him also to be exempt from death reduces the plausibility of the view that he believes he cannot die because the end of his subjectivity is the very end of the world, although something like this may be going on (p. 42) when he says "when I am not, what will there be? There will be nothing."

9. Peter Ivanovich is by no means the worst of the characters Tolstoy portrays. He is vulnerable to truth and capable of horror at the report of Ivan's agony. The character who represents the devil is Schwartz. He maintains an air of amusement at the funeral and seduces Peter away from serious thoughts to a card game. (Might the choice of the name "Peter" be intended to remind us of Saint Peter, who also tried to be faithful to his friend but was not completely successful?)

10. That is, there is a crucial difference in attitude between (*a*) simply drawing a conclusion about yourself from the fact that something has happened to someone with traits you share and (*b*) being unwilling to attribute traits to yourself that might make you fare better than someone else. The latter, however, is still not the same as being as appalled at someone else's death as one is at the idea of one's own death. The more one is appalled by the idea of one's own death by comparison to the death of a friend, the more one thinks the worst has not yet happened when a friend dies but one still remains alive, the less one cares about the deceased by comparison to oneself. By contrast, in a case of extreme attachment, one's own death becomes anticlimactic, not because one no longer values one's life after the friend's death, but because one truly believes that one's death does not mean more to one than the death that has already happened. This should imply that one would have been willing to give one's own life to save the friend. (That the deaths are equal implies randomizing the chance of death, but to this must be added the desire that one's friend not suffer it.)

11. Even more harshly, the landowner in "Master and Man" (in *Tolstoy's Short Fiction*, ed. Michael R. Katz [New York: Norton, 1991]) dies when he does because he goes out in pursuit of more land, as does the character in "How Much Land Does A Man Need?" (in Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*).

12. Perhaps, however, in Tolstoy's worldview, there is always a hidden meaning to what seems an absurd end, so that it is really a fitting end.

13. See Thomas Nagel's "Death," in his *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

14. For more on the Limbo Man and the distinction between (1) and (2), see F. M. Kamm, "Why Is Death Bad and Worse than Pre-natal Nonexistence?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1988): 161–64, and F. M. Kamm, *Morality, Mortality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

15. See especially Tolstoy, "Ivan Ilych," p. 56: "'What is it you want?' . . . 'To live . . .' 'How?' . . . 'as I used to' The nearer he came to the present, the more worthless and doubtful were the joys."

16. See John Bayley's excerpt from his *Tolstoy and the Novel* (London: Chatto, 1966), reprinted in Katz, *Tolstoy's Short Fiction*, pp. 420–23.

17. Tolstoy, "Ivan Ilych," pp. 56–58. This is a striking parody of the aim to quantify, creating a Newtonian formula for diminishing value in life.

18. In the movie *The Sixth Sense*, the physically dead who survive in some nonphysical state do not realize that they are dead. Tolstoy asks us to believe that something similar is true of Ivan and those in his social circle: they do not realize how "dead" they are.

19. See James Olney, "Experience, Metaphor, and Meaning: The Death of Ivan Ilych," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1972): 101–14.

20. We can show that (i) desire for goods that might make one's life not be a waste is separate from (ii) desire for more goods per se, by considering someone who knows that his life will not have been a waste and who still wants more goods. He does not want them for the purpose of rescuing his life from being a waste.

21. I am, of course, focusing on a sense of "a wasted life" that involves someone wasting his life. Hence, the life's having good effects on others through their own efforts or by natural processes does not imply that the life was not a waste. If someone's wasted life serves as a useful lesson to many people, this does not mean that his life was not a waste in the relevant sense.

22. When Woody Allen complains that life is full of misery, suffering, and pain, and, furthermore, it's all over too soon, he may seem to gesture at a view behind the second thought. But Allen's quip merely suggests extinction is worse than endless bad stuff. His quip leaves it open that one might court extinction in exchange for some good stuff, even though death could then become bad both because we would have no more goods of life (1) and because of extinction (2).

23. I mean "possibility" in the sense that one is uncertain whether one will have to die.

24. Tolstoy's anger toward people like Ivan increases in his later stories—e.g., in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" For these people, unlike Ivan, death brings no conversion. These people, Tolstoy seems to think, deserve death rather than need it for the good its prospect can produce.

25. Does the asymmetry involve two sides of the same coin? For if one had to leave if one's life would never be worthwhile, it could not be true that one should *not* leave if one's life had not yet been worthwhile. But it is possible that one could appropriately go on living without living a worthwhile life, even if one did not need such a life in order for it to be appropriate to leave. Hence, the asymmetry does not involve two sides of the same coin.

26. Tolstoy, "Master and Man," p. 268.

27. An oddity in the ending to "Master and Man" is that while the master believes that he will live if Nikita does, he also believes that in dying he is going to meet God. He then would be in two different places at the same time, if we take things literally. In "Master and Man," both Nikita and the master think that it is only the master who has something big to lose if he loses his life. In truth, the master's life is not (on Tolstoy's view) worth living, so he would not lose much in losing that life, but his life can be saved from worthlessness if he dies in a certain way (e.g., by saving Nikita).

28. Tolstoy, "Ivan Ilyich," p. 56.

29. Alan Wood emphasized this point.

30. The light may be due to nothing more than (what we now know is) some increase in a brain chemical before death. But in the story Ivan does not just bask in serotonin bliss. And in any case, if the transmission of a spiritual message requires a physical process, this only makes it like any meaningful message that requires a physical script.

31. In "Master and Man," the Master dies for his servant (although it is not clear that he knew this is what he was doing) when he might possibly have lived instead. Ivan could not live instead, but he dedicates his death to his family's welfare. So (related to n. 1) his outward behavior in dying is the same as it would otherwise be, but the principle (maxim) behind it is different.

32. Tolstoy, "Ivan Ilych," p. 62.

33. From a religious point of view, it may not matter because of divine forgiveness. More on this below.

34. Similarly, in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, when Prince Andrei is first at a point close to death, this awakens him to "divine love"—love for friend and foe—that is different from love for any particular person. But this sort of love also allows him to respond differently to particular people—e.g., forgiving a particular enemy and also Natasha, his unfaithful fiancée. Still, there is a noticeable difference between Ivan's death and Prince Andrei's eventual actual death scene (when the oscillation between his passing away and his returning to ordinary life is over). Prince Andrei dies in a completely detached frame of mind; when his son is brought to him in tears (like Ivan's son), Andrei takes leave of him in a disengaged and perfunctory manner. By contrast, Ivan connects emotionally with particular people around him. Interestingly, the contrast reminds us again of the relation between commitment to a universal syllogism and to its particular implications. At the end, Prince Andrei is focused on the universal and is beyond its implications for particular people, but Ivan connects some universal truth with its implications for relations to particular people.

35. See Tolstoy, "Master and Man," p. 262.

36. It is a mistake, however, to think that even if God forgives one's faults, it is not important to be fault-free or for Ivan to achieve correct values after all. Being forgiven is not the same as becoming a good person or having a better life. These are good in themselves, not just means to avoid needing to be forgiven. It might be said, further, that it is only if one comes to have the correct values that one can fully believe that there is a God who will forgive one whether one was good or not, and so Ivan must first transform himself before he can be open to the good news. Still, this would just mean that his struggle is necessary in order for him to *know* that he will be forgiven, not that the struggle is necessary in order for him to be forgiven. By contrast, the view that only those who are repentant—not everyone—will be forgiven would imply that Ivan must struggle to achieve new values, and go through the agony of rejecting his past values and most of his past life in order to be forgiven. (Nikita just has to recognize occasional failures to live up to values he already holds.) There is another connection between trying to be good and the existence of a forgiving God. An appropriate response to a supernatural person who is forgiving and so exhibits a form of goodness is to be good oneself and avoid giving cause for forgiveness. By contrast, if the impersonal universe simply does not register our faults, there is no appropriate response to this, per se, other than perhaps relief that one will suffer no punishment.

37. In "Master and Man," the Master is presented as dying in joy because he believes that he hears a supernatural voice of one to whom he is coming (p. 268).

38. Michael Slote discusses the issue of inclines and declines in life in "Good and Lives," in his *Goods and Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983). I first discussed views I had developed independently on this topic as the commentator on Slote's paper at the 1982 New Jersey Regional Philosophical Association meeting. Subsequently, I discussed inclines and declines in life and between nonexistence and life in "Why Is Death Bad and Worse than Pre-natal Nonexistence?" and then in *Morality, Mortality*, Vol. 1. David Velleman discusses the issue of patterns in life in his "Well-Being and Time," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991): 48–77. When Ivan notices the downward pattern of his life (as quoted in sec. III), he does not mean to imply that the total of goods and bads in his life would have been no different if he had had an upward pattern instead. Rather, he sees his upward alternative life as starting from the same point at which he did start, but going up; this would have entailed more overall nonpattern goods in his upward rather than downward life.

39. Discussed, along with others, in *Morality, Mortality*, Vol. 1, pp. 67–71.

40. See Velleman's "Well-Being and Time." This, of course, need not mean that one may produce the bad just so that good may come of it.

41. Figures A1 and A2 solidify this result by testing for whether a dramatic reversal to good or a dramatic reversal to bad, placed elsewhere than at the end, has as much significance.

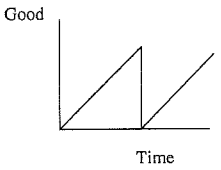

FIGURE A1

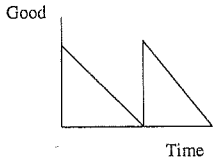

FIGURE A2

42. Jay Wallace pointed out the connection with Kantian good will.

43. I expand on this in the text below.

44. As noted earlier, David Velleman's "Well-Being and Time" argues that the past can be redeemed by such a role in producing future events.

45. I am grateful to Richard Arneson for his questions concerning the value of a change at the end of life that prompted the discussion in sec. V.

46. We should keep in mind that even though Ivan died at home, not in an impersonal hospital, he was surrounded by coldness.

47. Again, see Nikita's almost death and real death in "Master and Man."

48. This is important to remember in connection with discussions (e.g., Y. J. Dayananda, "The Death of Ivan Ilych: A Psychological Study on Death and Dying," reprinted in Katz, *Tolstoy's Short Fiction*) that interpret Ivan Ilych as an imaginative "confirmation" of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's empirical description of the stages most people go through in the dying process (see her *On Death and Dying* [New York: Macmillan, 1969]). These stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and resignation. On the one hand, such an interpretation will completely miss the point of Ivan's case, since Kubler-Ross does not describe as a typical stage individuals' rejecting the worth of their lives as Ivan does. Her patients' anger and depression do not arise from such a rejection. So Ivan has characteristics that they lack. On the other hand, Tolstoy's descriptions of the dying process of people whom he thinks have lived as they ought do not involve denial, anger, bargaining, or depression. Tolstoy and Kubler-Ross are not superimposable.

49. What of Ivan's son's honest feelings? We are told that he is at an age when he is beginning to be corrupted, and we can expect that in the normal course of events he would become like Ivan. But, sad to say, with his father dead, he may have a better chance to avoid emotional and moral corruption. For his father was the embodiment of social values and as such would have played a large role in his warping. (According to these values, Ivan judged that his daughter was a success but not his son. And, of course, it is his son and not his daughter who feels deeply about his death. She is absorbed in starting a new married life. Like Lear, Ivan has misunderstood the relative worth of his children's characteristics.)

50. Obviously, these are simplified extreme types. Most people fall in between.

51. I discuss the two points of view on a life, from within and without, in *Morality, Mortality*, Vol. 1. They seem to correspond to what Ronald Dworkin calls the critical versus experiential values. See his *Life's Dominion* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

52. Again, I am distinguishing how we should respond to the spontaneous awakening. I am not recommending that we should induce the awakening. While it is worthwhile, it is painful, so it seems that only the (inner needs of the) person himself should determine whether it starts.

53. This could happen because impulses that the right-living person repressed, or emotions he did not indulge, get the upper hand when he is in a weakened state. Then "their" view of his life is dominant. Someone who approved of Ivan's life will say that this is just what happened to him.

54. This case is different from changes due to dementia, which do not reflect on the true moral character of the person.

55. Admittedly, this conflicts with the possibility that those who have been good deserve more consideration of their interests than do those who have been bad. It also assumes that a sudden death does not involve a very rapid version of what happens in a prolonged dying.

2

Conceptual Issues Related to Ending Life

In order to discuss the morality of ending life, it is necessary to understand a range of concepts and distinctions that may have moral significance.[1] This chapter is intended to introduce those concepts and distinctions. Later chapters will deal with the moral issues.

Suicide involves someone ending his life, intending his death either as an end itself or as a means to some further end. Assisted suicide involves someone helping another person commit suicide. Sometimes, we can help people accomplish their goals without sharing their goals. Hence, it remains open that someone who assists a suicide does not intend that the person end his life; perhaps he intends only that the person be able to do whatever he wants to do.[2] Often, it is physician-assisted suicide in which people are most interested.[3]

Euthanasia involves someone doing something to bring about another's death—in particular, killing or letting die—with the intention that the person die because the death is in the best interests of the person who will die. It differs from physician-assisted suicide undertaken in the interest of the person who dies partly in that it involves killing or letting die by someone other than the patient (e.g., the doctor) in order to end the patient's life. (Unlike suicide and assisted suicide, death being in the person's interests is involved in the definition of euthanasia. One can commit suicide when this is against one's interests. One cannot succeed in euthanizing someone if the death is not in that person's interests.)

How can death be overall in someone's interest?[4] Some have argued that the idea of euthanasia makes no sense because it is logically impossible to seek to benefit someone by bringing about his death, given that death eliminates the person. We cannot produce a benefit if we eliminate the potential beneficiary, it is argued. But someone can be benefited by death even if it involves his nonexistence, just as someone can be made worse off by death even though it involves his nonexistence. To be benefited or made worse off, one need not continue on in a state of good experience or bad experience. For example, if one's life would have included goods if it had continued, then at least *one* of the ways in which one is made worse off by death is that it interferes with those goods; as a result of death, one has had a less good life, a life that is seriously worse overall than one would have had. The shorter