ity, which seeks a way to live as an individual that affirms the equal worth of other individuals and is therefore externally acceptable. Morality is a form of objective reengagement. It permits the objective assertion of subjective values to the extent that this is compatible with the corresponding claims of others. It can take various forms, some of which I have discussed. All of them involve, to one degree or another, occupying a position far enough outside your own life to reduce the importance of the difference between yourself and other people, yet not so far outside that all human values vanish in a nihilistic blackout.

But there is more to integration than that. The most general effect of the objective stance ought to be a form of humility: the recognition that you are no more important than you are, and that the fact that something is of importance to you, or that it would be good or bad if you did or suffered something, is a fact of purely local significance. Such humility may seem incompatible with full immersion in one's life and in the pursuit of those enjoyments and goods that it makes possible. It may sound like a form of deadening self-consciousness, or self-denigration, or asceticism; but I don't think it has to be.

It does not create self-consciousness but simply gives it content. Our capacity for taking an external view of ourselves poses the problem; we cannot get rid of it, and we must find some attitude or other that reckons with it. Humility falls between nihilistic detachment and blind self-importance. It doesn't require reflection on the cosmic arbitrariness of the sense of taste every time you eat a hamburger. But we can try to avoid the familiar excesses of envy, vanity, conceit, competitiveness, and pride—including pride in our culture, in our nation, and in the achievements of humanity as a species. The human race has a strong disposition to adore itself, in spite of its record. But it is possible to live a complete life of the kind one has been given without overvaluing it hopelessly. We can even resist the tendency to overvalue the historical present, both positively and negatively; what is going on in the world right now is not for that reason especially important. The present is where we are, and we cannot see it only in timeless perspective. But we can forget about it now and then, even if it won't forget about us.

Finally, there is an attitude which cuts through the opposition between transcendent universality and parochial self-absorption, and that is the attitude of nonegocentric respect for the particular.[2] It is conspicuous as an element in aesthetic response, but it can be directed to all kinds of things, including aspects of one's own life. One can simply look hard at a ketchup bottle, and the question of significance from different standpoints will disappear. Particular things can have a noncompetitive completeness which is transparent to all aspects of the self. This also helps explain why the experience of great beauty tends to unify the self: the object engages us immediately and totally in a way that makes distinctions among points of view irrelevant.

2. I am grateful to Jacob Adler for making me see this.

It is hard to know whether one could sustain such an attitude consistently toward the elements of everyday life. It would require an immediacy of feeling and attention to what is present that doesn't blend well with the complex, forward-looking pursuits of a civilized creature. Perhaps it would require a radical change in what one did, and that would raise the question whether the simplification was worth it.

Apart from this, the possibilities for most of us are limited. Some people are genuinely unworldly, but if it doesn't come naturally, the attempt to achieve this condition is likely to be an exercise in dishonesty and self-distortion. Most of us care a great deal about forms of individual success that we can see from an impersonal standpoint to be much less significant than we cannot help taking them to be from inside our lives. Our constitutional self-absorption together with our capacity to recognize its excessiveness make us irreducibly absurd even if we achieve a measure of subjective-objective integration by bringing the two standpoints closer together. The gap is too wide to be closed entirely, for anyone who is fully human.

So the absurd is part of human life. I do not think this can be basically regretted, because it is a consequence of our existence as particular creatures with a capacity for objectivity. Some philosophers, such as Plato, have been unhappy that the higher self was trapped in a particular human life, and others, such as Nietzsche, have denigrated the role of the objective standpoint; but I believe the significant diminution of either of them in force or importance would lessen us and is not a reasonable aim. Repression can operate effectively and damagingly not just against the instincts but against the objective intelligence. These civil wars of the self result in an impoverished life. It is better to be simultaneously engaged and detached, and therefore absurd, for this is the opposite of self-denial and the result of full awareness.

3. Death

The desire to go on living, which is one of our strongest, is essentially first-personal: it is not the desire that a particular, publicly identifiable human being survive, though its fulfillment of course requires the survival of someone like that, and therefore it collides with objective indif-

ference about the survival of anyone in particular. Your relation to your own death is unique, and here if anywhere the subjective standpoint holds a dominant position. By the same token, the internal standpoint will be vicariously dominant in your attitude toward the deaths of those to whom you are so close that you see the world through their eyes.

Some people believe in an afterlife. I do not; what I say will be based on the assumption that death is nothing, and final. I believe there is little to be said for it: it is a great curse, and if we truly face it nothing can make it palatable except the knowledge that by dying we can prevent an even greater evil. Otherwise, given the simple choice between living for another week and dying in five minutes I would always choose to live for another week; and by a version of mathematical induction I conclude that I would be glad to live forever.

Perhaps I shall eventually tire of life, but at the moment I can't imagine it, nor can I understand those many distinguished and otherwise reasonable persons who sincerely assert that they don't regard their own mortality as a misfortune.[3]

I can't take the kind of metaphysical consolation offered by Parfit (who observes that his view has parallels with Buddhism). By breaking down the metaphysical boundaries between himself and other persons, and loosening the metaphysical bonds that connect him now with his future self, he claims to have become less depressed about his own death, among other things. His death will be the termination of a certain connected sequence of activities and experiences, but not the annihilation of a unique underlying self. "Instead of saying, 'I shall be dead', I should say, 'There will be no future experiences that will be related, in certain ways, to these present experiences'. Because it reminds me what this fact involves, this redescription makes this fact less depressing" (Parfit (2), p. 281). As I've said in chapter 3, I can't accept the metaphysical revision, but I'm not sure that if I did, I'd find the conclusion less depressing. I actually find Parfit's picture of *survival* depressing—but that of course is by comparison with what *I* take survival to be. By comparison with Parfitian survival, Parfitian death may not seem so depressing; but that may owe as much to the deficiencies of the former as to the advantages of the latter. (See his remarks on p. 280.)

I am not going to concentrate here on explaining why death is a bad thing. Life can be wonderful, but even if it isn't, death is usually much worse. If it cuts off the possibility of more future goods than future evils for the victim, it is a loss no matter how long he has lived when it happens. And in truth, as Richard Wollheim says, death is a misfortune even when life is no longer worth living (p. 267). But here I want to say something about what it means to look forward to our own deaths, and how, if at all, we can bring the inner and outer views together. The best I can hope to offer is a phenomenological account. I hope it is not simply idiosyncratic. Like the contingency of our birth, the inevitability of our death is easy to grasp objectively, but hard to grasp from within. Everyone dies; I am someone, so I will die. But it isn't just that TN will be killed in a plane crash or a holdup, have a stroke or a heart attack or lung cancer, the clothes going to the Salvation Army, the books to the library, some bits of the body to the organ bank and the rest to the crematorium. In addition to these mundane objective transitions, my world will come to an end, as yours will when you die. That's what's hard to get hold of: the internal fact that one day this consciousness will black out for good and subjective time will simply stop. My death as an event in the world is easy to think about; the end of my world is not.

3. For example Williams (3), ch. 6, "The Makropulos Case; Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality." Can it be that he is more easily bored than I?

One of the difficulties is that the appropriate form of a subjective attitude toward my own future is expectation, but in this case there is nothing to expect. How can I expect nothing *as such*? It seems that the best I can do is to expect its complement, a finite but indeterminate amount of something—or a determinate amount, if I am under definite sentence of death. Now a good deal could be said about the consequences of the finiteness of my future, but that is relatively banal and something most of us automatically allow for, particularly after reaching the age of forty. I am concerned with the adequate recognition of my eventual annihilation itself. There will be a last day, a last hour, a last minute of consciousness, and that will be it. Off the edge.

To grasp this it isn't enough to think only of a particular stream of consciousness coming to an end. The external view of death is psychological as well as physical: it includes the idea that the person who you are will have no more thoughts, experiences, memories, intentions, desires, etc. That inner life will be finished. But the recognition that the life of a particular person in the world will come to an end is not what I am talking about. To grasp your own death from within you must try to look *forward* to it—to see it as a *prospect*.

Is this possible? It might seem that there could be no form of thought about your own death except either an external view, in which the world is pictured as continuing after your life stops, or an internal view that sees only this side of death—that includes only the finitude of your expected future consciousness. But this is not true. There is also something that can be called the expectation of nothingness, and though the mind tends to veer away from it, it is an unmistakable experience, always

startling, often frightening, and very different from the familiar recognition that your life will go on for only a limited time—that you probably have less than thirty years and certainly less than a hundred. The positive prospect of the end of subjective time, though it is logically inseparable from these limits, is something distinct.

What is the specific object of this feeling? In part, it is the idea of the objective world and objective time continuing without me in it. We are so accustomed to the parallel progress of subjective and objective time that there is some shock in the realization that the world will go calmly on without me after I disappear. It is the ultimate form of abandonment.

But the special feeling I am talking about does not depend only on this, for it would be there even if solipsism were true—even if my death brought with it the end of the only world there was! Or even if, reversing the direction of dependence, my death was going to occur *in consequence* of the end of the world. (Suppose I came to believe a crackpot scientific theory that as the result of a spectacular and inexorable rise in matter/antimatter collisions, the universe was going to annihilate itself completely six months from now.) It is the prospect of nothingness itself, not the prospect that the world will go on after I cease to exist, that has to be understood.

It hardly needs saying that we are accustomed to our own existence. Each of us has been around for as long as he can remember; it seems the only natural condition of things, and to look forward to its end feels like the denial of something which is more than a mere possibility. It is true that various of my possibilities—things I might do or experience—will remain unrealized as a result of my death. But more fundamental is the fact that they will then cease even to be possibilities—when I as a subject of possibilities as well as of actualities cease to exist. That is why the expectation of complete unconsciousness is so different from the expectation of death. Unconsciousness includes the continued possibility of experience, and therefore doesn't obliterate the here and now as death does.

The internal awareness of my own existence carries with it a particularly strong sense of its own future, and of its possible continuation beyond any future that may actually be reached. It is stronger than the sense of future possibility attaching to the existence of any particular thing in the world objectively conceived—perhaps of a strength surpassed only by the sense of possible continuation we have about the world itself.

The explanation may be this. In our objective conception of the world, particular things can come to an end because the possibility of their nonexistence is allowed for. The possibility of both the existence and the

nonexistence of a particular object, artefact, organism, or person is given by actualities which underlie either possibility and coexist with both of them. Thus the existence of certain elements and the truth of the laws of chemistry underlie the possibility of synthesizing a particular chemical compound, or of decomposing it. Such possibilities rest on actualities.

But some possibilities seem themselves to be basic features of the world and not to depend on more deep-seated actualities. For example the number of possible permutations of m things taken n at a time, or the number of possible Euclidean regular solids, are possibilities whose existence is not contingent on anything.

Now the various possibilities some of which make up my life, and many of which I will never realize, are contingent on my existence. My existence is the actuality on which all these possibilities depend. (They also depend on the existence of things outside me which I can encounter, but let me leave that aside for the moment.) The problem is that when I think of myself from the inside, there seems to be nothing still more basic which reveals the actuality of my existence as in turn the realization of a possibility of existence which is correlative with a possibility of nonexistence based on the same foundation. In other words the possibilities which define the subjective conditions of my life seem not to be explainable in turn, within a subjective view, as the contingent realization of deeper possibilities. Nothing is subjectively related to them as the existence of the elements is related to the possibility of a compound.

To explain them we have to go outside of the subjective view for an objective account of why TN exists and has the characteristics that determine his subjective possibilities. They rest on an external actuality.

But this gives rise to an illusion when we think about our lives from inside. We can't really make these external conditions part of the subjective view; in fact we have no idea how they generate our subjective possibilities on any view. It is as if the possible contents of my experience, as opposed to the actualities, themselves constituted a universe, a domain within which things can occur but which is not itself contingent on anything. The thought of the annihilation of this universe of possibilities cannot then be thought of as the realization of yet another possibility already given by an underlying subjective actuality. The subjective view does not allow for its own annihilation, for it does not conceive of its existence as the realization of a possibility. This is the element of truth in the common falsehood that it is impossible to conceive of one's own death.

All this is fairly obvious, but I think it explains something. The sense each person has of himself from inside is partly insulated from the exter-

nal view of the person who he is, and it projects itself into the future autonomously, so to speak. My existence seems in this light to be a universe of possibilities that stands by itself, and therefore stands in need of nothing else in order to continue. It comes as a rude shock, then, when this partly buried self-conception collides with the plain fact that TN will die and I with him. This is a very strong form of nothingness, the disappearance of an inner world that had not been thought of as a contingent manifestation at all and whose absence is therefore not the realization of a possibility already contained in the conception of it. It turns out that I am not the sort of thing I was unconsciously tempted to think I was: a set of ungrounded possibilities as opposed to a set of possibilities grounded in a contingent actuality. The subjective view projects into the future its sense of unconditional possibilities, and the world denies them. It isn't just that they won't be actualized—they will *vanish*.

This is not just a realization about the future. The submerged illusion it destroys is implicit in the subjective view of the present. In a way it's as if I were dead already, or had never really existed. I am told that the fear of flying typically has as its object not just the possibility of crashing, but flying itself: hurtling along in a smallish vehicle miles above the surface of the earth. It's a bit like that, only in this case it's something you can repeatedly forget and rediscover: all along you have been thinking you were safely on the ground and suddenly you look down and notice that you're standing on a narrow girder a thousand feet above the pavement.

I have said nothing so far about the most perplexing feature of our attitude toward death: the asymmetry between our attitudes to past and future nonexistence. We do not regard the period before we were born in the same way that we regard the prospect of death. Yet most of the things that can be said about the latter are equally true of the former. Lucretius thought this showed it was a mistake to regard death as an evil. But I believe it is an example of a more general future-past asymmetry which is inseparable from the subjective view.

Parfit has explored the asymmetry in connection with other values such as pleasure and pain. The fact that a pain (of ours) is in prospect rather than in the past has a very great effect on our attitude toward it, and this effect cannot be regarded as irrational (Parfit (3), sec. 64).

While I have no explanation of the asymmetry, I believe it must be admitted as an independent factor in the subjective attitude toward our own death. In other words it can't be accounted for in terms of some other difference between past and future nonexistence, any more than the asymmetry in the case of pain can be accounted for in terms of some other difference between past and future pains, which makes the latter worse than the former.

It is a fact perhaps too deep for explanation that the cutting off of future possibilities, both their nonactualization and their obliteration even as possibilities, evokes in us a very different reaction from any parallel nonrealization or nonexistence of possibilities in the past. As things are, we couldn't have come into existence earlier than we did, but even if we could, we wouldn't think of prenatal nonexistence as the same kind of deprivation as death. And even though our nonexistence two hundred years ago faces us with the fact that our subjective existence is the realization of a possibility grounded in objective facts about the world, this does not affect us as the prospect of our annihilation does. The sense of subjective possibility does not project itself into the past with the same imaginative reality with which it faces the future. Death is the negation of something the possibility of whose negation seems not to exist in advance.

The incongruity between this and the objective view of death is clear; much of what was said about birth and the meaning of life applies here and need not be repeated. My death, like any other, is an event in the objective order, and when I think of it that way, detachment seems natural: the vanishing of this individual from the world is no more remarkable or important than his highly accidental appearance in it. That applies both to the full inner life of the individual and to the objective standpoint itself. Granted that the death of something that exists seems worse than its not coming into existence, it still seems not a matter of great seriousness, considered as part of the general cosmic flux.

Another reason to regard death without too much concern is that everyone's mortality is part of the general cycle of biological renewal which is an inseparable part of organic life. Particular deaths may be horrible or premature, but human death itself is a given which, like the fact that hawks eat mice, it makes no sense to deplore. This is no more consoling to someone about to die than it would be to a mouse about to be eaten by a hawk, but it is another obstacle to closing the subjective-objective gap.

One could try to close it in the opposite direction by arguing that the impersonal standpoint should take its view of each death from the attitude of the one whose death it is. If for each person his own death is awful, then every death should be regarded objectively as awful. Detached indifference would then be a form of blindness to what is clear from an internal perspective—and not the only example of such blindness.

There is something right about this; certainly it would be a good thing if some people took death more seriously than they do.[4] But if we try to do justice to the fact that death is the ultimate loss for everybody, it isn't clear what the objective standpoint is to do with the thought of this perpetual cataract of catastrophe in which the world comes to an end hundreds of thousands of times a day. We cannot regard all those deaths with the interest with which their subjects regard them: sheer emotional overload prevents it, as anyone who has tried to summon a feeling adequate to an enormous massacre knows. The objective standpoint simply cannot accommodate at its full subjective value the fact that everyone, oneself included, inevitably dies. There really is no way to eliminate the radical clash of standpoints in relation to death.

None of this means one can't subordinate one's life to other things—sometimes it would be indecent not to. People are willing to die for what is external to themselves: values, causes, other people. Anyone incapable of caring enough about something outside himself to sacrifice his life for it is seriously limited. Moreover such external concerns, while they may require the loss of life, often have the effect of diminishing that loss and can even be cultivated for the purpose. The more you care about people and things outside your own life, the less by comparison will be the loss from death, and you can, to a degree, reduce the evil of death by externalizing your interests as it approaches: concentrating on the welfare of those who will survive you and on the success of projects or causes that you care about independently of whether you will be around to see what happens. We see this kind of disinvestment in mortal, individual life all the time—and more ambiguously in the personal desire for posthumous fame, influence, or recognition.

But the effect of these measures should not be exaggerated. There is no way to achieve a fully integrated attitude no matter how much you expand your objective or posthumous interests. The objectively unremarkable death of this creature will terminate both its stream of conscious experience and the particular objective conception of reality in

4. The widespread willingness to rely on thermonuclear bombs as the ultimate weapon displays a cavalier attitude toward death that has always puzzled me. My impression is that whatever they may say, most of the defenders of these weapons are not suitably horrified at the possibility of a war in which hundreds of millions of people would be killed. This may be due to monumental lack of imagination, or perhaps to a peculiar attitude toward risk which leads to the discounting of probabilities of disaster substantially below 50 percent. Or it may be a mechanism of defensive irrationality that appears in circumstances of aggressive conflict. But I suspect that an important factor may be belief in an afterlife, and that the proportion of those who think that death is not the end is much higher among partisans of the bomb than among its opponents.

which its death is included. Of course from the objective standpoint the existence or nonexistence of any particular objective self, including this one, is unimportant. But that is a limited consolation. The objective standpoint may try to cultivate an indifference to its own annihilation, but there will be something false about it: the individual attachment to life will force its way back even at this level. Here, for once, the objective self is not in a position of safety. We may see more clearly, but we cannot rise above death by occupying a vantage point that death will destroy.

The objective standpoint can't really be domesticated. Not only does it threaten to leave us behind, but it gives us more than we can take on in real life. When we acknowledge our containment in the world, it becomes clear that we are incapable of living in the full light of that acknowledgment. Our problem has in this sense no solution, but to recognize that is to come as near as we can to living in light of the truth.