

Twelfth Meeting: Williams on The Tedium of Immortality

Preliminaries

Williams's Two Conditions:

1. *Identity*. " ... it should clearly be *me* who lives forever" (83).
2. *Attractiveness*. " ... the eternal life should be in prospect of some interest" (88).
"the state in which I survive should be one that to me looking forward, will be adequately related, in the life it presents, to those aims I now have in wanting to survive at all. ... since I am propelled forward into longer life by categorical desires, what is promised must hold out some hopes for those desires" (84).

An Outline of His Strategy?

Either your character stays the same or it changes:

If it stays the same, then either you're bored or perpetually absorbed.

If you're bored, then *Attractiveness* fails.

If you're perpetually absorbed, then you "lose yourself" and *Identity* fails.

If it changes, then *Attractiveness* fails.

The Main Argument

1. The "Eternal Decline Model" does not illustrate a way in which an eternal life could be desirable. (81)
2. The "Makropulos Model" does not illustrate a way in which an eternal life could be desirable. (81-84)
3. The "Serial and Disjoint Lives Model" does not illustrate a way in which an eternal life could be desirable. (84-86)
4. The "Teiresias Model" does not illustrate a way in which an eternal life could be desirable. (86)
5. The "Perpetual Absorption Model" does not illustrate a way in which an eternal life could be desirable. (87-90)
6. If (1) - (5) are true, then eternal life is not desirable (or meaningful, or something we could have reason to want).
7. Therefore, eternal life is not desirable (or meaningful, or something we could have reason to want).

On the Eternal Decline Model

“No one need deny that since, for instance we grow old and our power decline, much may happen to increase the reasons for thinking death a good thing” (81).

On the Makropulos Model

“Her trouble was, it seems, boredom: a boredom connected with the fact that everything that could happen and make sense to one particular human being of 42 had already happened to her” (82).

“This second condition the EM kind of survival failed, on reflection, to satisfy” (83-84).

On the Serial and Disjoint Lives Model

“... no comfort or hope will be forthcoming in this model to those who want to go on living” (85).

“... it is unclear how he is to bring this later character and its desires into a relation to his present ones, so as to be satisfied or the reverse with this marginal promise of continued existence” (85).

“... it is beside the point whether the prospects are congenial ... the force of the idea that the future life could be something that he *now* wanted to do on to, fades” (85).

On the Teiresias Model

“... it has the quality of a fantasy, of emotional pressure trying to combine the uncombinable” (86).

“Teiresias cannot have a character, either continuously through these proceedings or cumulatively at the end (if there were to be an end) of them: he is not, eventually, a person but a phenomenon” (86).

On the Perpetual Absorption Model

“... if one is totally and perpetually absorbed in such an activity, and loses oneself in it, then as those words suggest, we come back to the problem of satisfying the conditions that it should be me who lives forever, and that the eternal life should be in prospect of some interest” (88).

“... it seems quite unreasonable to suppose that those activities would have the fulfilling or liberating character that they do have for him, if they were in fact all he could do or conceive of doing” (88-89).

“... there is ... a loss of individuality itself and certainly of anything that could make an eternity of intellectual activity, so construed, a reasonable object of interest to one concerned with individual immortality” (90).