

Example of ivan ilyich and the assumed consensus essay

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



The “assumed consensus” is nothing new in human civilization. After all, every child grows up learning about a way to live that will bring happiness, that will turn into “the good life.” In much of the United States, that “assumed consensus” includes a home in the suburbs, or in a gentrified part of a city center that has gone through “urban renewal,” with a luxury car and a sport utility vehicle, a couple of kids placed in private schools or in the upscale public schools, depending on the neighborhood, and a vacation home. While it has been more than a century since Tolstoy penned “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” the phenomenon of the Assumed Consensus is still present; it only takes on a different form. Ivan is driven by a constant desire to improve his social position. He constantly acquires new material possessions in an attempt to impress his “friends,” which are merely fellow travelers on the wheel of accumulation. By devoting his life to meeting a standard of success that he accepted a young age, instead of finding his own standard of success, Ivan lives a life defined by others, a consensus assumed by him to be valid.

The story of the man who has lost sight of the true meaning of life, because he tried to follow a paradigm of success or self-worth that was foisted upon him by others, is a common one throughout literature, because the experience keeps happening, generation after generation. Whether it is King Agamemnon, living the life of adultery and narcissism that he thought was proper for all monarchs but ending up slain in his own bathtub, by his own wife, paid back for the thoughtlessness of his own deeds, or the character Kino in Steinbeck’s *The Pearl*, who sees tragedy come to his own family because of his decision to hang on to a black pearl that he finds, desperate

to sell it for riches that he cannot earn any other way, the truth is that following the false call of materialism can indeed lead to self-deception, if not tragedy. In the case of Ivan Ilyich, he loses all sense of meaning in his life because of his decision to make material advancement his top priority (Charmaz, p. 171). The end result is a marriage that becomes an exercise in anger management instead of a loving partnership, as both of them are much more interested in gaining the approval of their toadies and hangers-on than of each other. The superficiality with which Ivan Ilyich greets the world makes success possible, because he is able to treat those around him as rungs on a ladder, rather than human beings. However, it renders all of his human relationships meaningless, as he views others as means to an end as opposed to comrades on the long, winding road of existence (Kekes, p. 283). The end result of this is, as Ivan shows us, a deathbed with a man surrounded by no mourners, no comforters, no friends. Even if he had brought all of the money he had acquired over his life to sit with him at the grave, that money would only sit silently, preparing to rot beside him in the grave.

Works Cited

Charmaz, K. "Loss of Self: A Fundamental Form of Suffering in the Chronically Ill." *Sociology of Health and Illness* 5(2): 168-195.

Kekes, J. "Wisdom." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20(3): 277-286.