

The Desire for Immortality at the Dawn of the Third Millennium: The Anthropological Stakes

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“BUT, HAPPIEST BEYOND all comparison are those excellent *Struldbruggs*, who born exempt from that universal Calamity of human nature, have their Minds free and disengaged, without the weight and depression of Spirits caused by the continual Apprehension of Death.”¹

Gulliver’s exclamation upon discovering the existence of the immortal *Struldbruggs* is only one of the countless examples of mankind’s dream to free itself from its destiny ever since it was banished from the Garden of Eden. Ever since then, man has lived alongside death, which has ceaselessly prowled around its future prey. Strongly attracted by immortality, on the one hand, and on the other hand feeling repugnance and anguish toward death, the human being has developed a multitude of ways to domesticate it, to make it less frightening, less horrible in its appearance. Some think of it as the reaper who gathers the good grain and takes the harvest to paradise or makes room for the new generation. Others see it as an angel that will accompany them to an afterlife or as a liberator from the evils of this

¹ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), 176. Gulliver discovered, however, that although immortal, the *Struldbruggs* were in fact miserable, for they were subject to all disabilities, miseries, and human weaknesses.

one. Still others take it to be God's servant who bestows the laurel crown on the hero, gives the palm to the martyr, the halo to the saint, rest to the weary, and renders justice to the oppressed. Worried that it might surprise them and wishing to escape the violence of its coming, the philosopher of antiquity and then the early Christian monk counseled us to meditate continuously on death—hence the presence of the skull on their table, or in their oratory. In both cases, man thought that he would receive the wages for his acts in an afterlife.

As for Epicurus, because he rejects the idea of an afterlife, he also refuses to reflect on death, so as to live his life without always being disturbed by something he can do nothing about. So it is that two diametrically opposed philosophical attitudes have emerged: to be wise by reflecting on death, by living in its presence, or else to be wise by refusing outright to think about death. Still another possibility is the position of Martin Heidegger, with his thesis of Being-toward-death, which disputes immortality *a priori*, just like the Epicureans and the Stoics. Nevertheless, far from refusing to think about death, he proposes looking it in the eye. Aware that he cannot escape it, he invites it to sit down at the table so as to live in its presence in an attitude of authenticity. These attitudes toward death, however different they may be, all testify to a humble recognition of the helplessness that we experience in confronting the thing that deprives us so brutally of life.

Coming to light these days, however, is a new response to what the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre calls "the permanent alienation of my being-possibility which is no longer *my* possibility."² It is no longer a matter of submitting to death, but of attacking it head-on. This is what the supporters of transhumanism propose. In radical opposition to Heideggerian Being-toward-death, as well as to the *laissez-faire* attitude of the Epicureans and Stoics, they claim that death is only an accident in the living being's process, in short, that it is only an organic defect. One can be cured of death and reach, as it were, the dreamed-of goal of immortality. Certainly, we are not talking about immortality in the strict sense of the word, but rather about a sort of a-mortality in which the only death that occurs is accidental, for reasons that are external to the living being.

² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2000), 547. [originally *L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 631–32: "l'aliénation permanente de mon être-possible qui n'est plus *ma* possibilité"]. Unless otherwise noted, all English translation is my own.

My purpose here is not to elaborate the arguments of the philosophers who, following Bernard Williams and Hans Jonas,³ are currently debating whether immanent (this-worldly) immortal life is desirable. Nor do I wish to present the transhumanists' methods of escaping death, such as human-machine hybrids, "digital" or virtual immortality, and so on, or to examine whether or not they are realistic. However I will not conceal the fact that I strongly doubt it, given the similarity of their proposal to that one that the German neo-Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch developed in *The Principle of Hope*, which will be described briefly later on—a utopian view that did not withstand the catastrophes of the past century. Instead I wish to examine their discourse within the context of man's attitude toward his own death. I will ask whether their attitude, which manifests a radical refusal of anything that eludes knowledge and will, does not ultimately amount to a reduction of freedom itself. The transhumanist attitude, certainly, distances itself in part from contemporary proposals of the Epicurean and Heideggerian sort in matters concerned with death. Although Epicurus and Heidegger have their respective representations of death—extrinsic for the Greek, intrinsic for the German—they approve of a certain humility in accepting natural limits, the fact of being a mortal subject. Both consider the desire for immortality as "vain" and "irrational," and so they concentrate instead on how to live well in the present. The transhumanists, in contrast, do not want to acknowledge these limits and assert that man, by his own power, is capable of liberating himself from what he considered until now to be his unfortunate destiny: the wages of

³ The question arose in opposition to the Epicurean thesis which claims that death is nothing to us and should therefore not be considered as an evil. Adopting the perspective that views death as an evil depending on the circumstances, the philosophers then wondered whether a human life that was without death, "immortal," would be desirable. The great majority of the arguments correspond to a utilitarian, consequentialist ethic that attempts to weigh and compare incommensurate factors, the principles of which can be found also in the debate over whether it is desirable to prolong life, which is associated with the notion of "quality of life." See: Bernard Williams, "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973 [repr. 1995]), 82–100; Hans Jonas, "The Burden and Blessing of Mortality," in *Mortality and Morality. A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, ed. Lawrence Vogel with introduction (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 87–98 [first presented to the Royal Palace Foundation in Amsterdam on March 19, 1991, and then published in English in *The Hastings Report* 22, no. 1 (1992): 34–40, and in German as "Last und Sterblichkeit," in Jonas, *Philosophische Untersuchungen und metaphysische Vermutungen* (Frankfurt am main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 81–100].

his sin or quite simply the consequence of nature. The transhumanists too are characterized by a will to control and a refusal to “let go.” Such “letting go” would imply some openness to a new dimension, distinct from domination, the dimension of the gift.

In the first part of this article I will discuss the thesis of the rejection of the desire for transcendent (other-worldly) immortality because, as they say, it would be a refusal to live this mortal life, as well as the proposals of contemporary philosophers of death who aim to live happily while accepting man’s radical finitude. I will present the position of Epicurus, who is experiencing a very strong resurgence of interest in the context of contemporary philosophy, as well as the thesis of the Heideggerian inversion of Being-toward-death, which imbues contemporary thanatology to such an extent that some have considered it irreversible. Then, after presenting the desire for immortality through technology, I will argue that the above-mentioned rejections of transcendent immortality presuppose a reduction of reality to what will and reason are able to control. These refusals are based on a concept of individual autonomy that does not allow for the possibility of receiving immortality as a gift while remaining profoundly free. To conclude, I will maintain that at work at the heart of the desire for immortality is an anthropological insight implying the dimension of otherness and availability, a dimension that eludes control and, by that very fact, can receive immortality gratuitously as a gift.

The Anguish of the Desire for Transcendent Immortality

Belief in a transcendent immortality has been decried as profoundly inhumane, since it keeps a human being from getting involved in life to make the world more just. “I conjure you, my brethren, *remain faithful to earth* and do not believe those who speak unto you of superterrestrial hopes! Poisoners they are whether they know it or not. Despisers of life they are, decaying and themselves poisoned, of whom earth is weary: begone with them!”⁴ Anyone who entertains such a desire for immortality in a transhistorical next world is fleeing life, Friedrich Nietzsche exclaims. He is a coward, the German philosopher Günther Anders explains, for he adopts

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, vol. 8 in *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Alexander Tille (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 5–6 [originally *Also sprach Zarathustra*, vol. 4 in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 15: “Ich beschwöre euch, meine Brüder, *bleibt der Erde treu* und glaubt denen nicht, welche euch von überirdischen Hoffnungen reden! Giftmischer sind es, ob sie es wissen oder nicht. Verächter des Lebens sind es, Absterbende und selber Vergiftete, deren die Erde müde ist: so mögen sie dahinfahren.”].

a dying, backward-looking attitude. "I think that hope is just another word for cowardice. . . . No, we should not raise hopes, we should prevent hope. For because of hope no one will act. Everyone who hopes leaves improvement up to some other authority."⁵ Referring to a superterrestrial hope is tantamount to rejecting action and involvement in this life. He goes on to write: "But in a situation in which only one's own action matters, 'hope' is just a word for the renunciation of autonomous action."⁶ The French philosopher Albert Camus denounces such a desire for immortality and its hope in a life after this earthly life as a posture of "resignation"⁷ that is radically opposed to life. He sees Nietzsche's bid and raises it: "For if there is a sin against life, it lies perhaps less in despairing of it than in hoping for another life and evading the implacable grandeur of the one we have."⁸ Moreover, according to the French philosopher Françoise Dastur, the next world is a "deceptive" "illusion,"⁹ and so if a human being invents for himself a superterrestrial immortal soul, it is because he cannot manage "to accept the finitude of its earthly condition."¹⁰

This rejection of the desire for transcendent immortality, which deeply imbues contemporary thanatology, leads philosophers to transform their meditation on death into a meditation on life, in the framework of what Emmanuel Levinas describes as a "finitude without infinity."¹¹ Two aspects

⁵ Günther Anders, *Günther Anders antwortet: Interviews und Erklärungen* (Berlin: Tiamat, 1987), 151–52: "Ich glaube, Hoffnung ist nur ein anderes Wort für Feigheit. . . . Nein, Hoffnung hat man nicht zu machen, Hoffnung hat man zu verhindern. Denn durch Hoffnung wird niemand agieren. Jeder Hoffende überläßt das Besserwerden einer anderen Instanz."

⁶ Anders, *Interviews*, 152: "Aber in einer Situation, in der nur das Selbsthandeln gilt, ist 'Hoffnung' nur das Wort für den Verzicht auf eigene Aktion."

⁷ Albert Camus, "Nuptials," in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Thody, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 63–106, at 92 [originally "Noces," in *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1965 [repr. 1990]), 51–88, at 76: "résignation"].

⁸ Camus, "Nuptials," 91 [original: "S'il y a un péché contre la vie, ce n'est peut-être pas tant d'en désespérer que d'espérer une autre vie, et se dérober à l'implacable grandeur de celle-ci"].

⁹ Françoise Dastur, *How Are We to Confront Death?*, trans. Robert Vallier (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 42 [originally *Comment affronter la mort?* (Paris: Bayard, 2005), 83: "leurre . . . trompeur"]. See Werner Fuchs, *Todesbilder in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 50–51.

¹⁰ Dastur, *How Are We to Confront Death?* 11 [*Comment affronter la mort?* 25: "à accepter la finitude de sa condition terrestre"].

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 36 [originally *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1993), 45: "finitude sans infini"].

of this rejection are prevalent once again at the beginning of this new millennium: one illustrated by Epicurus, the other by Heidegger.

The Foolishness of Someone Who Desires Transcendent Immortality

The famous Epicurean thesis that “death is nothing for us”¹² results from the presupposition that death is inscribed in iron-clad natural laws; Lucretius explains that “each thing proceeds after its own fashion.”¹³ The key to happiness lies in the knowledge of these limits and in deep respect for them, in other words, in the refusal to transcend them. The wise man takes as his watchword the resolution not to want to go beyond these limits and to be content with what can be controlled, in the present. Recall the distinction made by Epictetus in his *Handbook*: the wise man worries only about things that depend on him. As for those that do not depend on him, namely those things that by nature are not under his control, he accepts them without being upset by them. So it is with death, which is beyond the power of our will, and therefore no one should try to transcend it, on pain of presumption and useless suffering. Similarly, Epicurus proposes reducing to a minimum the desires that one cannot fulfill, so as not to suffer at all. A human being becomes wise by renouncing both an afterlife and the desire for it. He limits himself to desires whose objects he can obtain by his own power. “Freedom is the greatest fruit of self-sufficiency”; thus the wise man is self-sufficient,¹⁴ he does not depend on anyone or anything else in order to actualize his desires. An existence that is autarchic to this extent is the very life of the gods, who are self-sufficient. Epicurus could not be clearer when he exclaims on the subject of the wise man: “You will live like a god among men.”¹⁵ To indulge in desires that one cannot satisfy would lead only to anxiety and disturbance. The prospect of a future that eludes the will troubles the soul; it fears being unable to obtain the object of its desire. The desire for immortality is a vain desire. Jean Salem neatly explains Epicurus’ position: “Human unhappiness essentially has to do with failure

¹² Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* 125, trans. Cyril Bailey, in *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York: Modern Library, 1940), 30–33, at 30.

¹³ Titus Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.5.923, trans. William H. D. Rouse, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 405: “res quaeque suo ritu procedit.”

¹⁴ Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 77, in *Letters, Principal Doctrines and Vatican Sayings*, trans. Russel M. Geer (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 72.

¹⁵ Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* 125 at 33: “You will never be seriously troubled, but you will live like a god among men. For the man living in immortal goods in no way resembles a living mortal.”

to check a desire that would try to force nature [such as the desire for immortality]; to be happy, in contrast, is to know the *limit of one's desires* and, as a corollary, the limit of goods and evils."¹⁶ This is the ideal of the mortal free man. He shifts the meditation on death toward meditation on life. Confronting death could prove dangerous, for that involves unsettling the individual in question.

The Epicurean wise man agrees with the very contemporary attitude, inspired by Stoicism, that consists of avoiding confrontation with death so as to stick to what one can master. Baruch Spinoza nicely illustrates this attitude (which was adopted recently by the French philosopher André Comte-Sponville):

A free man, that is, he who lives solely according to the dictates of reason, is not guided by fear of death, but directly desires the good, that is, to act, to live, to preserve his own being in accordance with the principle of seeking his own advantage. So he thinks of death least of all things, and his wisdom is a meditation upon life.¹⁷

If Epicurus and the Stoic tradition renounce desires that go beyond man's control, it is in the final analysis because they are anguished by the idea of suffering and being troubled: "For it is to obtain this end that we always act, namely, to avoid pain and fear."¹⁸ To this we might add the anguish of finding oneself in a situation that escapes the control of the will, in a situation of extreme vulnerability in which achieving one's desire would depend on others.

Ultimately the reason for this limitation of one's own desires, the deliberate renunciation of a dimension that is beyond one's control, and of any additional meaning given to death is found in the fear of being upset and constrained to accept not being lord and master of oneself and having to commend oneself to another instead. This reason also implies the idea that the loss of control would restrict the subject's freedom and thereby would go against his very dignity. I maintain that such anguish is at the origin of the Heideggerian thesis of Being-toward-death. Heidegger acknowledges

¹⁶ Jean Salem, *Tel un Dieu parmi les hommes* (Paris: Vrin, 1989), 83: "Le malheur humain tient essentiellement à l'illimitation d'un désir qui voudrait forcer la nature [tel, par exemple, le désir d'immortalité] ; être heureux, par contraposition, c'est connaître la *limite des désirs* et, corollairement, celle des biens et des maux."

¹⁷ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt. 4, prop. 67, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1982), 193. See André Comte-Sponville, *Le Bonheur, désespérement* (Nantes, FR: Éditions Pleins Feux, 2000).

¹⁸ Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* 128 (p. 31).

with Epicurus the natural limits circumscribing human existence; he distances himself from the Greek philosopher, as we will see in a moment, by maintaining that death is a constitutive part of life. Midway between these two propositions emerges Ernst Bloch's new Jerusalem in *The Principle of Hope*. Bloch defends a desire for immanent immortality whose realization in hope, however, depends only on human action. It is a matter of setting up a "messianic kingdom of God—without God"¹⁹ by *praxis* alone, through socio-political activism, in short by the worldwide Marxist revolution: "Where there is Lenin, there is Jerusalem."²⁰

The tragedies of the twentieth century ended up killing this desire for immortality in immanence, obtained by human strength alone, that the philosophers of progress and the prophets of the earthly city had promised. Hence this desire was relegated to the domain of "religious" experience (understood as irrational). The German philosopher Thomas Macho explains:

No one believes in immortality any more. . . . In the past few decades the last remaining substitutes for hopes of immortality were shattered. We have no more reason to expect to live on in our children or in our works; we have no more reason to trust in the "everlasting life" of the human species or in the development of the "world spirit."²¹

¹⁹ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 3:1200: "The utopia of kingdom destroys the fiction of a creator-god and the hypostasis of a heavenly god, but not the end-space in which ens perfectissimum contains the unfathomed depth of its still unthwarted latency. The existence of God, indeed God at all as a special being is superstition; belief is solely that in a messianic kingdom of God—without God. Atheism is therefore so far from being the enemy of religious utopia that it constitutes its precondition: *without atheism messianism has no place*" [originally *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, in *Ernst Bloch Werkausgabe*, 16 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 5:1413: "Utopie des Reichs vernichtet die Fiktion eines Schöpfergotts und die Hypostase eines Himmelsgotts, doch eben nicht den End-Raum, worin Ens perfectissimum den Abgrund seiner noch unvereitelten Latenz hat. Dasein Gottes, ja Gott überhaupt als eigene Wesenheit ist Aberglaube; Glaube ist einzig der an ein messianisches Reich Gottes—ohne Gott. Atheismus ist folglich so wenig der Feind religiöser Utopie, daß er deren Voraussetzung bildet : *ohne Atheismus hat Messianismus keinen Platz*"].

²⁰ Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 2:610 [*Prinzip Hoffnung*, 711: "Ubi Lenin, ibi Jerusalem"].

²¹ Thomas Macho, *Todesmetaphern* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 116: "An Unsterblichkeit wird nicht mehr geglaubt. . . . In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten haben sich noch die letzten Substitute der Unsterblichkeitshoffnungen zerschlagen. Wir haben keinen Anlass mehr, unser Fortleben in den Kindern oder in den

Hence the question arises: How to live life in the presence of the certainty of death? The Jewish woman Etty Hillesum gives us her answer. We read in her journal entry dated July 3, 1942—she would be sent to the gas chamber in Auschwitz on November 30, 1943:

By “coming to terms with life” I mean: the reality of death has become a definite part of my life; my life has, so to speak, been extended by death, by looking death in the eye and accepting it, by accepting destruction as part of life and no longer wasting my energies on fear of death or the refusal to acknowledge its inevitability. It sounds paradoxical: by excluding death from our life, we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death into our life we enlarge and enrich it.²²

The proposal to invite death to table and to live somehow with it was developed before World War II by Heidegger, in his famous thesis of Being-toward-death, in which he denounces the fact that modern man does not live in the presence of death, as the German philosopher Max Scheler had emphasized before him, incidentally.

The Heideggerian Thanatological Inversion

In the early twentieth century Max Scheler, in his book *Death and Survival*, had formulated an original thesis on the subject of the decline of belief in transcendent personal immortality. This decline is not based

Werken zu erwarten; wir haben keinen Anlass mehr, auf das ‘unendliche Leben’ der menschlichen Gattung oder auf den Bildungsprozess des ‘Weltgeistes’ zu vertrauen.” See also Chantal Delsol, *L’Âge du renoncement* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 188–89: “L’homme contemporain sans identité ne recherche pas non plus l’immortalité. Il a éloigné de soi les religions et les espérances d’éternité. Il a révoqué les idéologies et les espoirs millénaristes de l’immortalité sociale. Mais aussi, comme individu souverain et indépendant, il a délié son existence des œuvres tout humaines propres à le dépasser. Il apparaît, et c’est peut-être la première fois dans l’histoire, absolument privé du *temps long*” (“Contemporary man, having no identity, does not seek immortality either. He has put away religions and hopes of eternity. He has dismissed ideologies and millenarian hopes of social immortality. But as a sovereign, independent individual, he has also detached his existence from altogether human works that are capable of surpassing him. He appears, perhaps for the first time in history, absolutely deprived of the *long term*”).

²² Etty Hillesum, journal entry of July 3, 1942, in *An Interrupted Life—The Diaries, 1941–1943, and Letters from Westerbork*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans, with introduction and notes by Jan G. Gaarlandt and foreword by Eva Hoffman (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 155.

on the rational deconstruction of the “proofs,” nor even on the decision to relegate it to the status of a practical postulate, but rather, he explains, on “modern man’s relation to death itself,”²³ in other words, on the way in which “modern man intuitively pictures his life and his death” and “experiences them.” Indeed, even if, as Scheler asserts, immortality is the object of an “immediate intuition,” of an “unthinking experience,” of “his natural worldview,”²⁴ modern man flees from this intuition because he has ceased living in “death’s presence.” He represses it from his consciousness. The individual is content to live his everyday life in what Heidegger calls inauthenticity and the “One dies,” which is invariably perceived as someone else’s business. The phrase “one dies” dominates everyday life and expresses something distressing, “an indefinite something which above all must duly arrive from somewhere or other, but is proximately *not yet at present-at-hand* for oneself, and is therefore no threat.”²⁵ This more or less conscious refusal to confront death expresses also a refusal to reflect on the possibility of transcendent immortality. Indeed, having a sure awareness, while living, of being mortal, the person realizes the threat of his possible disappearance. By facing up to this unavoidable reality he is revealed as fully human and transcends in a way his biological dimension.

Although Heidegger, following Scheler, urges contemporary man to live in the authenticity of his condition as a mortal, he radically overturns the latter’s thesis by positing that death is not only inherent to the structure of a living thing at the biological level but also constitutive of the ontological structure of a human being. Anguish in the face of death can be overcome and mastered only by acknowledging that the human ontological structure is defined by Being-toward-death. Death is the limit that has been established a priori, in terms of which it is necessary to consider the authenticity of a human life. We should not desire to surpass this limit. Death is neither an accomplishment nor a terminus at the end of the road, but rather one of man’s ways of being, from the moment he is thrown into the world. Being-toward-death is for Heidegger the very “selfness” of the human being, in other words, what constitutes him in his individuality. It

²³ Max Scheler, *Tod und Fortleben: Schriften aus dem Nachlass*, vol. 1 (Bern: Francke-Verlag, 1957), 15: “das Verhältnis des modernen Menschen zum Tode selbst.”

²⁴ Scheler, *Tod und Fortleben*, 13: “unmittelbare Intuition”; “unreflektierter Lebenserfahrung”; “natürlichen Weltanschauung.”

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 297 [originally *Sein und Zeit*, 16 ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), 253: “Ein unbestimmtes Etwas, das allererst irgendwoher eintreffen muss, zunächst aber für einen selbst *noch nicht vorhanden* und daher unbedrohlich ist.”

is ontologically immanent to him in terms of a constant possibility, which however cannot be overtaken.

Death is a possibility-of-being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its *ownmost* potentiality-for-being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. . . . This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one. As potentiality-for-being, Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus *death* reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped*. As such, death is something *distinctively impending*.²⁶

For a large number of contemporary thanatologists, the Heideggerian thesis of Being-toward-death is definitive. Hence, supposedly, we can no longer speak reasonably about a desire for transcendent immortality. That is the lot reserved for fools and church mice. As the German philosopher Hans Ebeling puts it:

Before Heidegger, even philosophical thanatology had still preserved the hope for some kind of immortality. With Heidegger it is abandoned. And since Heidegger it can no longer be restored with the methods of philosophy.²⁷

²⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294 [*Sein und Zeit*, 250: "Der Tod ist eine Seinsmöglichkeit, die je das Dasein selbst zu übernehmen hat. Mit dem Tod steht sich das Dasein selbst in seinem *eigensten* Seinkönnen bevor. In dieser Möglichkeit geht es dem Dasein um sein In-der-Welt-sein schlechthin. Sein Tod ist die Möglichkeit des Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens. . . . Diese eigenste, unbezügliche Möglichkeit ist zugleich die äusserste. Als Seinkönnen vermag das Dasein die Möglichkeit des Todes nicht zu überholen. Der Tod ist die Möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseinunmöglichkeit. So enthüllt sich der *Tod* als die *eigenste, unbezügliche, unüberholbare Möglichkeit*. Als solcher ist er ein *ausgezeichneter* Bevorstand"]. *Dasein* designates the human being, i.e. the being who "is-there" in the world as existing.

²⁷ Hans Ebeling, "Einleitung: Philosophische Thanatologie seit Heidegger," in *Der Tod in der Moderne*, ed. Hans Ebeling (Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1992), 11: "Vor Heidegger hatte auch die philosophische Thanatologie die Hoffnung auf eine Unsterblichkeit noch bewahrt. Mit Heidegger ist sie preisgegeben. Und seit Heidegger ist sie mit Mitteln der Philosophie nicht mehr zu restaurieren."

If Ebeling is right, the Heideggerian thanatological inversion renders obsolete any philosophy that tries to transcend temporality, any attempt to uphold the hope of a superterrestrial life. Man's greatness would then lie in the acceptance of his Being-toward-death, in his authenticity when he comes to terms with his radical finitude. To accept our mortal condition is just what Françoise Dastur recently proposed, incidentally: "*Becoming* a mortal would require that we stop giving in to the illusions of immortality and become capable of truly living on the earth and dwelling in a body."²⁸

The Heideggerian proposal of Being-toward-death, like that of Epicurus, is rooted in the refusal to let oneself be upset by a reflection that would lead to something beyond death; this line of argument renounces the possibility of receiving some meaning that would transcend Being-toward-death. The Heideggerian thesis, nevertheless, is based on an a priori limitation of time. This presupposition is erroneous, because to be constituted as a being that is essentially in-front-of-itself does not imply logically and a priori that a human being is a Being-toward-the-end, a mortal-being. This implies instead that he is radically open to a future of possibles, to the indeterminate. His future remains resolutely uncertain for him. He does not know how he will be and what he will become. From an ontological perspective, nothing allows us to conclude that the tending of a human being toward the future implies an end. In other words, one cannot maintain that the human being is a Being-toward-death by referring solely to the statement that he tends toward the future.

The ontology toward the future of possibles recently appeared within analytic philosophy in the context of the debate about death. One of the key figure of this current, the American philosopher Thomas Nagel, while debating the status of death considered as an evil and responding to the Epicurean position, notes (without however referring to existentialism or to vitalism): "A man's sense of his own experience, on the other hand, does not embody this idea of a natural limit. His existence defines for him an essentially open-ended possible future. . . . He finds himself the subject of a *life*, with an indeterminate and not essentially limited future."²⁹ Therefore in contrast to Heideggerian ontology and to his theory of death that is immanent through dread of death, one can propose a radically open ontology (that would not be limited by any end). This is the framework

²⁸ Dastur, *How Are We to Confront Death?* 47 [*Comment affronter la mort?* 93–94: "Devenir mortel, ce serait en effet cesser de céder aux illusions de l'immortalité et parvenir à véritablement habiter la terre et séjourner dans un corps"].

²⁹ Thomas Nagel, "Death," in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 9–10.

within which the transhumanists present their proposal to repossess death through science and prophesy an immanent immortality.

The Transhumanists' Desire for Immanent Immortality

The transhumanists attack the Heideggerian assertion that a human being is a Being-toward-death. They maintain that death is not immanent to life. Following August Weismann,³⁰ they assert that death is extrinsic to the living being. Or, as the French philosopher Edgar Morin puts it: "Biology discovered *that death was not a necessity of organic life*. Living beings, at their origin, in their elementary structure, are not Heideggerian at all. Only accidental death is natural."³¹ It follows that if death was considered as a sickness, one could recover from it. He continues: "Old age and death as disturbances *therefore open the way to action*. Practical action which for the moment can be only palliative, but which can become restorative."³²

Within this context of practical action, the transhumanists take up again the torch of the philosophers of progress. They endorse a certain hope: the actualization of the object of this hope depends solely on the subject and on his action. Thus they agree with Bloch's hope—while categorically refusing to acquiesce in natural limits. Their objective is to surpass them definitively, to abolish them with the help of technology and genetics. The will asserts that it wants to free itself from death by itself, through reason that would construct a perfect body, free of all imperfections, failings, and vulnerabilities. The French sociologist David Le Breton summarizes the position as follows: "The body is the endemic illness of the mind or of the subject"; the human body is "the rough copy to be corrected" until one obtains "the ultimate perfection."³³ And the sociologist of the body explains, in his book *L'Adieu au corps* (farewell to the body):

³⁰ See August Weismann, *Über Leben und Tod. Eine biologische Untersuchung* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1884).

³¹ Edgar Morin, *L'Homme et la Mort* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 331: "La biologie a découvert *que la mort n'était pas une nécessité de la vie organique*. Les êtres vivants, à leur origine, dans leur structure élémentaire ne sont nullement heideggériens. Seule la mort accidentelle est naturelle."

³² Morin, *L'Homme*, 339: "La vieillesse et la mort comme perturbations *ouvrent donc la voie à l'action*. Action pratique qui pour le moment ne peut être que palliative, mais qui peut devenir restaurative."

³³ David Le Breton, *L'Adieu au corps* (Paris: Éditions Métailié, 1999), 10: "Le corps est la maladie endémique de l'esprit ou du sujet"; "le brouillon à corriger"; "la perfection ultime."

In scientific discourse the body is thought of as indifferent matter that merely supports the person. Ontologically distinguished from the subject, it becomes an object to be disposed of, on which to act so as to improve it, a sort of prime matter in which personal identity is diluted, and no longer as a root of a human being's identity. . . . Removed from the human being whom it embodies in the manner of an object, emptied of its symbolic character, the body is emptied of all value too. As the envelope of a presence, the architecture of materials and functions, the basis of its existence is then no longer the irreducibility of its meaning and value, the fact that it is a human being's flesh, but rather the permutation of the elements and functions that keep it in working order. The body is broken down into detached pieces, it crumbles. . . . Given this disdain for being made of flesh, the body is dissociated from the human being whom it embodies and is envisaged as something in itself. It is doomed to countless revisions in order to escape its precarious nature and limitations, and to control that elusive part, to achieve a technological purity. There is a demiurgic temptation to correct and modify it, if not to make of it a really flawless machine.³⁴

"The final goal of the algenist is to engineer the perfect organism,"³⁵ Jeremy Rifkin observes. It is no longer a matter of withdrawing into a Stoic atti-

³⁴ Le Breton, *L'Adieu au corps*, 9–11: "Dans le discours scientifique le corps est pensé comme une matière indifférente, simple support de la personne. Ontologiquement distingué du sujet, il devient un objet à disposition sur lequel agir afin de l'améliorer, une matière première où se dilue l'identité personnelle et non plus une racine identitaire de l'homme. . . . Soustrait de l'homme qu'il incarne à la manière d'un objet, vidé de son caractère symbolique, le corps l'est aussi de toute valeur. Enveloppe d'une présence, architectonique de matériaux et de fonctions, ce qui fonde alors son existence ce n'est plus l'irréductibilité du sens et de la valeur, le fait qu'il soit la chair de l'homme, mais la permutation des éléments et des fonctions qui en assurent l'ordonnance. Le corps se décline en pièces détachées, il s'émiette. . . . Face à ce dépit d'être constitué de chair, le corps est dissocié de l'homme qu'il incarne et envisagé comme un en-soi. Voué aux innombrables biffures pour échapper à sa précarité, à ses limites, contrôler cette part insaisissable, atteindre une pureté technicienne. Tentation démiurgique de le corriger, de le modifier, à défaut d'en faire une machine réellement impeccable."

³⁵ Jeremy Rifkin, *Algeny* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 17. See also *Human Enhancement*, ed. Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) and *Mere Machines to Transcendent Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

tude, but of freeing oneself from the limits of one's body. The Belgian philosopher Gilbert Hottois acknowledges that the elimination of death would finally come to free us from "our dread of death, our experience of the ephemeral and universal contingency."³⁶ Le Breton also explains, quite pertinently, that "the struggle against the body increasingly reveals the underlying motive for it: the fear of death."³⁷ In order to make this fear disappear, the transhumanists propose rebelling against death and rejecting categorically the natural limit that it represents. They say that they are on the way to eliminating it. These "magicians of biotechnology"³⁸ (as Jonas calls them) claim that "immortality is within our grasp,"³⁹ Ray Kurzweil notes; Mike Treder rejoices that this will be "hopefully within your lifetime."⁴⁰ And Kurzweil maintains, in his famous book *The Singularity Is Near*: "We have the means right now to live long enough to live forever."⁴¹ "Our mortality will be in our own hands. We will be able to live as long as we want."⁴²

The transhumanist proposal claims to be the extension of humanism and the Enlightenment project: to make human nature better by liberating it from all laws imposed from outside, including, in the transhumanists' view, the ultimate limit to the subject's autonomy, which is the mortal, suffering, vulnerable body. Here is the creed of the philosopher Nick Bostrom, founder of the World Transhumanist Association (WTA) in 1998 and director of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University: "We are no longer forced to accept what nature has given us." Mastery of death implies, in the final analysis, that we have "more control over our own life, total mastery, and that we develop the type of ideal that we want."⁴³ The elimination of death would make it possible

³⁶ Gilbert Hottois, *Essais de philosophie bioéthique et biopolitique* (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 76: "... notre angoisse de la mort, [de] notre expérience de l'éphémère et [de] la contingence universelle."

³⁷ Le Breton, *L'Adieu au corps*, 11: "La lutte contre le corps dévoile toujours plus le mobile qui la soutient: la peur de la mort." (translation mine)

³⁸ Jonas, "Burden and Blessing," 97 ["Last und Sterblichkeit," 98: "die Hexenmeister der Biotechnologie"].

³⁹ Ray Kurzweil and Terry Grossman, *Fantastic Voyage—Live Long Enough to Live Forever* (New York: Rodale, 2004), 3.

⁴⁰ Mike Treder, "Emancipation from Death," in *The Scientific Conquest of Death: Essays on Infinite Lifespans*, ed. Immortality Institute (Buenos Aires: LibrosEnRed, 2004), 187–196, at 187.

⁴¹ Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005), 271.

⁴² Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near*, 23.

⁴³ Cited in Antoine Robitaille, "Entretien avec Nick Bostrom, le transhumaniste

to be freed from the limits that circumscribed both the Epicurean-Stoic and the post-Heideggerian attitudes, so as finally “to determine ourselves radically,” Morin emphasizes.⁴⁴ In the anthology *The Scientific Conquest of Death*, edited by the Immortality Institute, Treder explains that the promise to “live forever free from illness, disease, and physical disability” implies that we will finally be “free to do whatever we want with our lives.”⁴⁵

The Anthropological Stakes of the Desire for Immortality

The various contemporary thanatological positions that we have just reviewed agree in their refusal to be upset by death and their intention of mastering it: by refusing to think about it, or else by thinking of it unceasingly, or else categorically by eliminating it. This attitude of mastery is opposed to the attitude of “passive” availability; when the free subject adopts the latter, he finds himself so to speak “compelled” to be open to otherness, to someone or something else that radically eludes his desire for mastery. The transhumanist proposal, just like those that preceded it, is based on freedom understood as sovereign. The subject should not desire anything that exceeds his will; every desired object should be obtainable by his mastery. And so therefore, according to the German philosopher Dieter Birnbacher, submitting to a desire such as the desire for transcendent immortality would be contrary to human dignity, which is based on the absolute autonomy of the subject. Professing the impossibility of any immortal life and therefore the illusory character of the desire for transcendent immortality, he maintains that reference to any superterrestrial hope infantilizes a human being, reducing him to a pre-Enlightenment state.

en chef,” in *Le nouvel homme nouveau: voyage dans les utopies de la posthumanité* (Quebec: Boréal, 2007), 175–188, at 176: “Nous ne sommes plus contraints d’accepter ce que la nature nous a donné”; “plus de contrôle sur notre propre vie, [que nous en soyons] totalement maître et [que nous puissions] développer le type d’idéal que nous souhaitons.” See also Nick Bostrom, “In Defense of Posthuman Dignity,” *Bioethics* 19, no. 3 (2005): 202–14, at 202–3: “Transhumanism is a loosely defined movement that has developed gradually over the two decades and can be viewed as an outgrowth of secular humanism and the Enlightenment. It holds that current human nature is improvable through the use of applied science and other rational methods, which may make it possible to increase human health span, extend our intellectual and physical capacities, and give us increased control over our own mental states and moods. . . . Such enhancements may make us, or our descendants, ‘posthuman’ beings who may have indefinite health spans, much greater intellectual faculties than any current human being, . . . as well as the ability to control their own emotions.”

⁴⁴ Morin, *L’Homme*, 348: “s’autodéterminer radicalement.”

⁴⁵ Treder, “Emancipation from Death,” 190.

The explanation for this rejection lies in the anthropological consequences of the notion of hope: the actualization of the object then eludes human action; it depends neither on having nor on doing, but rather on the voluntary acceptance of the gift. This hope, according to Birnbacher, would be contrary to “what are in our culture fundamental notions of personhood, autonomy and coexistence defined by respect and equality.”⁴⁶ Encouraging someone else to hope in this way amounts to considering him dependent on another and therefore not considering him as an equal. “To raise hopes in an adult for which there is no rational latitude, means treating him not as an interlocutor but as a patient. He is in a certain way incapacitated.”⁴⁷ Hoping for something when its actualization does not depend on human will is the sign of a sick, dependent person, in short, of someone who is imperfect, suffering, and mortal.

This refusal to transcend the limit set by human will characterizes the Epicurean-Stoic, Heideggerian, and transhumanist attitudes. They deliberately close themselves off from additional meaning that comes from elsewhere, from a certain receptiveness of the will; indeed they fear to go freely beyond what is in their power; such a step would imply a loss of freedom and would reduce them to the status of a minor.

Are we looking at an erroneous concept of freedom? This at least is the thesis advanced by the American philosopher Michael Sandel in his recent book *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*. He describes the transhumanist ideal as “the ultimate expression of our resolve to see ourselves astride the world, the masters of our nature.” He insists that to seek to master everything is to understand freedom solely within the parameters of what can be mastered, which excludes every gift, even the gift of life. “But that vision of freedom is flawed. It threatens to banish our appreciation of life as a gift, and to leave us with nothing to affirm or behold outside our own will.”⁴⁸ The transhumanists’ desire for immortality can be viewed as “the ultimate expression of the hubris that

⁴⁶ Dieter Birnbacher, “Hoffnung—eine philosophische Annäherung,” in *Hoffnung in Wissenschaft, Gesellschaft und Politik in Tschechien und Deutschland*, ed. Michael Andel, Detlev Brandes, and Jiri Pesek (Essen: Klartext-Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008), 17–32, at 32: “mit den in unser Kultur tragenden Vorstellungen von Personalität, Autonomie und eines durch Achtung und Gleichheit bestimmten Miteinanders.”

⁴⁷ Birnbacher, “Hoffnung,” 32: “Einem Erwachsenen Hoffnungen zu machen, für die kein rationaler Spielraum besteht, bedeutet, ihn nicht als Diskurspartner, sondern als Patienten zu behandeln. Er wird in gewisser Weise entmündigt.”

⁴⁸ Michael Sandel, *The Case against Perfection. Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007): 99–100.

marks the loss of reverence for life as a gift.”⁴⁹

And so desiring immortality leads to a more fundamental anthropological question: at the heart of our humanity, is there not something more primordial—not so much chronologically as ontologically—than mastery? Something on the order of a gift? Distancing himself from the ideal of the manly, heroic Heideggerian subject who masters himself in his Being-toward-death, Emmanuel Levinas inverts the relation to the knowing subject’s death by making it analogous to the subject’s relation toward others: “The unknown of death signifies that the very relationship with death cannot take place in the light, that the subject is in relationship with what does not come from itself. We could say that he is in relation with mystery.”⁵⁰

Death is a mystery that eludes man’s mastery and control. “Death announces an event over which the subject is not the master, an event in relation to which the subject is no longer a subject,”⁵¹ in other words, an event toward which he is passive, even if he were to choose his death. Death expresses “what we cannot take upon ourselves.”⁵² Levinas emphasizes: “At a certain moment we are no longer *able to be able*. It is precisely thus that the subject loses his very mastery as a subject.”⁵³ Earlier he elaborates:

It is not with the nothingness of death, of which we precisely know nothing, that the analysis must begin, but with the situation where something absolutely unknowable appears. Absolutely unknowable means foreign to all light, rendering every assumption of possibility impossible, but where we ourselves are seized.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Sandel, *Case against Perfection*, 127.

⁵⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987 [repr. 2002]), 70 [originally *Le temps et l'autre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 56: “L’inconnu de la mort signifie que la relation même avec la mort ne peut se faire dans la lumière; que le sujet est en relation avec ce qui ne vient pas de lui. Nous pourrions dire qu’il est en relation avec le mystère”].

⁵¹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 70 [*Le temps et l'autre*, 57: “La mort annonce un événement dont le sujet n’est pas le maître, un événement par rapport auquel le sujet n’est plus sujet”].

⁵² Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone, 1999), 155 [originally *Altérité et transcendance* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1995), 158: “que l’on ne peut assumer”].

⁵³ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 74 [*Le temps et l'autre*, 62: “À un certain moment nous ne pouvons plus pouvoir; c’est en cela justement que le sujet perd sa maîtrise même de sujet”].

⁵⁴ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 71 [*Le temps et l'autre*, 58: “Ce n’est pas du néant de

The subject's autonomous will, understood as mastery, finds itself compelled to abdicate when confronted with death. This abdication nevertheless does not necessarily lead ultimately to nothingness. Aspiring to immortality does not originate in dread of nothingness, but rather in the subject's desire for additional meaning that surpasses him, that transcends the domineering dimension of his will and reason. Freedom requires absolutely that one be open to a broader dimension, on the order of the gift, which radically eludes mastery. Life does not belong to us. It is given to us, as Sandel emphasizes. It is transcendent.

The desire for transcendent immortality is different from reason and will as they were promoted by Enlightenment thinkers or the transhumanists. The will must decide not to be able to control everything and to consent to be moved and upset by a world that is broader than what can be known by technological, rationalist reason alone. The will must decide, not to be merely passive, but to offer an active response, to receive "from elsewhere," in other words to accept no longer being the master of what is to be desired and known. In short, the will must consent to be vulnerable—contrary to what Birnbacher says about it—and to be open to a hope that consents to the fact that human existence and its future do not depend on its own power. What is at stake is the very freedom of the human being, who does not define himself exclusively by an assured mastery of reality, but also and above all by the ability to choose to make himself available, to receive a gift and to consent to it. In order to do this, it is necessary to renounce absolute control of oneself, the autarchy that Sandel denounces. Ultimately it is about renouncing the renunciation of desires just because one cannot personally realize them, so as to consent to going beyond the will's mastery, so as to be open to transcendence.

C. S. Lewis marvelously summarizes this concept of freedom:

We have been like bathers who want to keep their feet—or one foot—or one toe—on the bottom, when to lose that foothold would be to surrender themselves to a glorious tumble in the surf. The [result] of parting with our last claim to intrinsic freedom. . . [is] real freedom.⁵⁵

Ultimately freedom consists of letting oneself be seized by something that

la mort dont précisément nous ne savons rien que l'analyse doit partir, mais d'une situation où quelque chose d'absolument inconnaissable apparaît; absolument inconnaissable, c'est-à-dire étranger à toute lumière, rendant impossible toute assumption de possibilité, mais où nous-mêmes sommes saisis"].

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 131.

eludes the will that masters what it desires. It presupposes a receptivity that is not passive but active in the sense of a welcoming availability. One is receptive in exemplary fashion in the act of hope that is open to what does not depend on human will and reason, to what eludes them, to what a human being has no hold on. Hope is the entreaty of non-mastery, of receptivity to the gratuitous gift in the radical sense of that term. The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel explains that, “metaphysically speaking, *the only authentic hope is one that pertains to what does not depend on us*, the hope that springs from humility, not pride.”⁵⁶ Its object can be received only as a gift. The Canadian philosopher Kenneth L. Schmitz explains:

For that hope is grounded in a recognition of a certain transcendence in things that carries us beyond ourselves and our new-found power. The proposal, then, is a call to thoughtful conversion through an approach to the world about us that responds to it as a gift and not simply as a given.⁵⁷

The desire for immortality finally implies an attitude toward human life that results in an apparent paradox with regard to human freedom. It will flourish only inasmuch as it voluntarily agrees to relinquish its mastery of reality so as to allow itself to be captured by a dimension that transcends it; so too with life received as a gift. A kind of freedom that refused to be open to alterity (otherness) and was content with what it was capable of mastering would lead to a denial of the gratuitous character of life. On the contrary, being open to death, which is alterity par excellence, consists, as François Cheng says, of “receiving life as a invaluable generous gift.”⁵⁸ And the German philosopher Josef Pieper adds that this confrontation with death reveals the hidden structural law of all life:

. . . that one possesses only what one lets go of, and that one loses what one tries to hold. What is required of man in the moment of death, for the first and only time, is to realize this very thing. It is required, but at that moment he is also enabled to do so; he is

⁵⁶ Gabriel Marcel, *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique* (Louvain and Paris: E. Nauwelaerts and Vrin, 1949), 73: “métaphysiquement parlant, *la seule espérance authentique est celle qui va à ce qui ne dépend pas de nous*, celle dont le ressort est l’humilité, non l’orgueil.”

⁵⁷ Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Recovery of Wonder: The New Freedom and the Asceticism of Power* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), xiii.

⁵⁸ François Cheng, *Cinq méditations sur la mort autrement dit sur la vie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2013), 37: “recevoir la vie comme un don d’une générosité sans prix.”

expected literally, not just “by intention,” not just “in good will,” not just symbolically and rhetorically, but in reality to lose his life in order to gain it.⁵⁹

Confronting death in this way is not motivated by dread of nothingness, and therefore by an irritable contraction, but rather by a fundamental hope that allows a person to inhabit life fully by welcoming it, which thereby enlarges it. Even though he recognizes that death is the evil par excellence, a human being imbued with hope does not escape into an afterlife that prevents him from becoming involved to make the world a better place. On the contrary, he inhabits it fully, while remaining open to another world, ready to let himself be inspired by something that does not come from himself.

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⁵⁹ Josef Pieper, *Death and Immortality*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St- Augustine's Press, 2000), 92 [originally *Tod und Unsterblichkeit*, in *Werke in acht Bänden*, ed. Berthold Wald (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1997), 5:280–397, at 371: “Daß man nämlich nur das besitzt, was man losläßt, und daß einem verloren geht, was man zu behalten sucht—genau dies zu realisieren ist dem Menschen nun, im Augenblick des Todes, zum ersten und einzigen Mal abverlangt, aber auch ermöglicht und zugetraut: das eigene Leben nicht nur ‘der Intuition nach’, nicht nur ‘in der guten Meinung’ und nicht nur symbolisch und rhetorisch, sondern buchstäblich und wirklich zu verlieren—um es zu gewinnen”].