“IN SORROW WE MUST GO, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR”: J.R.R. Tolkien and the Modern Philosophies of Death and Immortality

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J.R.R. Tolkien and the Modern Philosophies of Death and Immortality

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“The Passing of Arwen” © Jenny Dolfen

“For I am the daughter of Elrond. I shall not go with him now when he departs to the Havens; for mine is the choice of Lúthien, and as she so have I chosen, both the sweet and the bitter.” - Arwen

(J.R.R. Tolkien, *Return of the King*, Book VI, Chapter 8)

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INTRODUCTION

Few stories in Middle-Earth lie as close to the heart of Tolkien's Legendarium as the story of Aragorn and Arwen and the love between a mortal man and an immortal elf. From the moment they met, their love was doomed, for Elves and Men are separated by fate. But by grace, Arwen was granted the choice of Lúthien, her forbearer, and she "chose mortality, and to die from the world, so that she might follow"[1] Aragorn when his time would come. And indeed, many years later, when Aragorn laid down his life, Arwen "tasted the bitterness of the mortality that she had taken upon her"[2]. But Aragorn's last words were filled with hope: "In sorrow we must go, but not in despair".[3] Only then did Arwen truly understand both the sweetness and the bitterness of death, the gift of Ilúvatar to Men. Afterwards, Arwen went to Lórien and laid herself to rest there, and as the only elf since Lúthien, she died and passed beyond the circles of the world.

With stories like these, J.R.R. Tolkien himself places death and immortality at the centre of his Legendarium. In one of his letters he wrote: "The real theme for me is (…) Death and Immortality: the mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race 'doomed' to leave and seemingly lose it; the anguish in the hearts in a race 'doomed' not to leave it, until its whole evil-aroused story is complete".[4] As such, "Tolkien's literary masterpiece is (…) a profound investigation of the human condition, a literary reflection on human earthly existence"[5] through mortal Men 'destined' to leave the world through death and immortal Elves 'destined' not to leave the world. In the introduction to *The Broken Scythe: Death and Immortality in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien,* Verlyn Flieger writes: "The fantasy elements of Tolkien's imagination are (…) valuable not just because they are fantastic, but because their fantasy is the vehicle for the more somber, indeed tragic theme of mortality, of death as the end of human life".[6] Death and immortality are the deeper layer in Tolkien's legendarium and "without this deeper level the surface would collapse".[7] But why death and immortality?

Throughout the years it has been generally accepted that Tolkien was heavily influenced by his work as a medievalist in creating his Legendarium. According to many scholars "Tolkien

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[1] J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. (London: HarperCollins, 1997), Book II, Chapter 11
[2] J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. (London: HarperCollins, 2007), Appendix A.I.V
[3] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[4] Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), no.186
[5]Jon Mentxakatorre Odriozola "The Theological Meaning of Tolkien's 'Death as a Gift.'" *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 25, no. 1 (2022), 38
[6] Verlyn Flieger. "Preface." In *The Broken Scythe: Death and Immortality in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi, xxiii-xxvii. (Zurich: Walking Tree, 2012), xxiv
[7] Verlyn Flieger, "Preface.", xxiv

was fundamentally rooted and grounded in the past, partaking only minimally of the modern world, and that we should therefore look to medieval literature for an understanding of his literary creations".[8] Prominent Tolkien scholars such as Tom Shippey and Humphrey Carpenter have stated multiple times that Tolkien was not interested in modern works, Shippey writes "when it comes to modern writers, Tolkien was notoriously beyond influence".[9] It is true that Tolkien was a philologist, a professor of Medieval language and literature in Oxford, and "because we know that Tolkien was a scholar of medieval literature and language (…) we assume that he must necessarily have written his fiction in the same mode in which he studied and taught. We are partly right".[10] Therefore, in recent years new research has focussed on the modern side of Tolkien for "his modern reading was both more far-reaching than people have realize, and more significant for his creative imagination than has been assumed".[11] Even Tom Shippey has observed that amongst the areas not considered in research is "the influences on [Tolkien] of writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so often now deeply unfashionable, forgotten and out of print".[12] Thus providing plenty opportunity for research.

While Tolkien spend a good half of a century continuously editing and expanding his Legendarium, the world around him changed constantly as well. With new philosophies and ideologies arising during the beginning of the twentieth century, the academic world became a theatre of war where many of these conventional and controversial ideas clashed, amongst others those dealing with questions of life and death. Two of these philosophies were Existentialism and Transhumanism, which both had their own focus and answers when dealing with human existence. Since Tolkien was a well-educated man and was actively involved in the academic life in Oxford, it is likely that he was familiar with contemporary literature, scholarship and philosophy.

The aim of my thesis is therefore to research how J.R.R. Tolkien portrays death and immortality and how his view was shaped by views on death and immortality by contemporary philosophies during the writing of his Legendarium. By doing so, I hope to create an understanding and appreciation for the modern side in Tolkien's Legendarium and contribute to "a fresh view, and to correct the critical imbalance that has affected Tolkien scholarship".[13]

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[8] Holly Ordway. *Tolkien's Modern Reading: Middle-Earth Beyond the Middle Ages*. (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire, 2021), 5

[9] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien. The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before the Lord of the Rings. (London: HarperCollins, 2015), 351

[10] Verlyn Flieger. *Green Suns and Faërie: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien*. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2012), 254

[11] Holly Ordway, *Modern Reading*, 8

[12] Tom Shippey. "An Encyclopedia of Ignorance." *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 45 (2008), 3

[13] Holly Ordway, *Modern Reading*, 8

In the first chapter, I will examine the meaning of death and immortality in Tolkien's Legendarium as well as the different natures of Elves and Men. Moreover, I will look more closely at two tales that heavily feature death and immortality. In the second chapter, I will examine Existentialism and it's philosophy of life and death, specifically through the works of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. In the last section, I will compare their works to that of J.R.R. Tolkien whether (and if so, how) he was influenced by these existential thinkers. In the third and last chapter, I will do the same for Transhumanism and the work of J.B.S. Haldane, together with a review of its critical reception, most notably by C.S. Lewis. Lastly, I will summarize and conclude what has previously been discussed.

CHAPTER 1: TOLKIEN ON IMMORTALITY

In the overwhelming richness of J.R.R. Tolkien's collected works, it can be hard to glean the single, central theme of the Legendarium. Even Tolkien himself only became aware of such a theme after a close rereading of his own works "with criticisms in mind",[14] as he states in one of his letters. As he writes that he has "become aware of the dominance of the theme of Death," he directly pardons himself by remarking: "Not that there is any original 'message' in that: most of human art and thought is similarly preoccupied."[15] Nevertheless, in the narrative of Middle-Earth, Tolkien presents his view on this philosophical and age-old topic in his own unique way: through myth.

In the first section of this chapter, I will start at the beginning of the Legendarium to examine the origin of the different natures of Elves and Men with the *Ainulindalë*. In the second and third section, I will discuss two major stories from the Legendarium that deal with death and immortality: that of Númenor and of the forging of the Rings of Power. Both these tales took place during the Second Age, have their origin in the First Age and their resolution in the Third Age in the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. In these stories, Tolkien clearly shows how Men and Elves are constantly driven by their desire to escape their natural end, regardless of how much life they have been granted. In the last section, I will further conclude upon Tolkien's view on death and immortality based on these tales.

Section 1.1: The different Gifts of Ilúvatar

In the Legendarium, the foundation for all dealings with mortality and immortality were laid at the creation of Arda. In the beginning, in the Timeless Halls, Eru Ilúvatar created the holy and immortal Ainur and gave them the power to make the Music of the Ainur, the *Ainulindalë*. Through this Music, all things that are were created, everything except Elves and Men. As they were the Children of Ilúvatar, they were created solely by him. To both races, Ilúvatar gave a different gift, a different purpose in the world and thus also different fates. When Ëa (that is, the 'World that Is') was created, some of the mightiest of the Ainur descended into it and became the Valar, the Powers of the World. And thenceforth, they were "bounded in the World, to be within it for ever, until it is complete, so that they are its life and it is theirs."[16] One of

[14] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no.208
[15] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no.208
[16] J.R.R. Tolkien. *Silmarillion* (Illustrated Edition). Edited by Christopher Tolkien and Ted Nasmith. (London: HarperCollins, 2021), 8

these Ainur was Melkor, but he did not come out of love for the Children, but rather "to subdue to his will both Elves and Men, envying the gifts with which Ilúvatar promised to endow them."[17] As such, as the Valar worked to prepare Arda for the coming of the Children, Melkor continuously opposed them, marring all that was made.

To understand the different natures of Elves and Men, one must understand Tolkien's concepts of *fëa* and *hröa* (plural: *fëar* and *hröar*).[18] These Quenya terms roughly translate to respectively 'spirit' and 'body'. In the Legendarium, "beings like Men and Elves (…) are by nature a union of a material body and a created, immaterial soul."[19] The relation between the two is what determines the different natures of the Children.

The first Children that awoke were the immortal Elves. To his Firstborn, Ilúvatar gave the love "for the beauty of the world," and he assigned them "to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection".[20] Therefore, the Elves were created immortal and "no sickness nor pestilence brought death to them".[21] Because of the love for the world, Ilúvatar intertwined their fate with that of Arda and their *fëar* "are bound to this world, never to leave it so long as it lasts, for its life is theirs".[22] Thus, "the Elves die not till the world dies".[23] As the years "lengthen ever more sorrowful" [24] they would become burdened and weary. As such, in Middle-Earth their *hröa* would slowly fade, being consumed by "the fire of their spirit" [25] until only their *fëa* remained. Only in the West are they spared this fate, for the separation of *fëa* and *hröa* is unnatural for the Elves and the result of the marring of Melkor.[26]

Upon the separation of their spirit and body, Elves are summoned to the Halls of Mandos where their spirits can be rehoused. Though an Elven *fëa* cannot escape this world, it can be separated from its *hröa* "by weapon and by torment and by grief" and become "houseless".[27] Then, the spirit can choose either to go to the Halls of the Dead, undergo Mandos' judgement and be possibly rehoused afterwards, or to reject the summoning and wander the world till the end of Arda yearning for their body. When a *fëa* heeds the summoning, his actions are judged

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[17] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 7
[18] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien. *Morgoth's Ring: The Later Silmarillion*. (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 217-219
[19] J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Nature of Middle-Earth*. Edited by Carl F. Hostetter. (London: HarperCollins, 2021),171
[20] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no.131
[21] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.*, 253
[22] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.*, 253
[23] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.*, 30
[24] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.*, 30
[25] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.*, 95
[26] Claudio A Testi. "Logic and Theology in Tolkien's Thanatology." Essay. In *The Broken Scythe: Death and Immortality in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi, 175–91. (Zurich: Walking Tree, 2012), 177
[27] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.*, 78

and after a just period of waiting, the Valar will create a new *hröa* and it is free to walk amongst the living again. However, not all are rehoused, and their spirits, like Fëanor's, will never leave the Halls of Mandos till the end of Arda.

The second Children that awoke were the mortal Men. Opposed to the Elves, Men were not created immortal within Arda, but are "more frail, more easily slain by weapons or mischance, and less easily healed; subject to sickness and many ills; and they grew old and died".[28] However, mortality is only part of the greater Gift bestowed upon them by Ilúvatar: the *fëar* of Men are not bound to Arda and only reside there as a guest or stranger. After their death (that is, the separation with their *hröar*) they will go to their true home beyond this world. Because of this, Ilúvatar "willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein" and consequently "have a virtue to shape their life amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else."[29] For Tolkien, "this is a key factor in human nature" as "it contributes to [their] freedom, since with it, in time, comes the sense that [they] are actually incomplete and can thus 'shape [their] life'".[30] Because of this, Men are the "sole masters of [themselves] within Arda, under the hand of [Eru]".[31] As an illustration, in *The Children of Húrin* even Morgoth fears that "Túrin would grow to such a power that the curse that he had laid upon him would become void, and he would escape the doom that had been designed for him".[32] Because of their mortal existence, in the short life they have in Arda, Men are granted the power to shape their own life and fate, despite external Powers.

The Nature of Death and Hope

By design, death is for Men the natural passage to their home beyond the world and it was only due to Melkor's marring that death became something to be feared. In the *Athrabeth*, Tolkien describes a debate between the Elven king Finrod Felagund and Andreth, a mortal Wise woman, about the nature of death. As they soon discover, though the lore of the Elves (as portrayed by *The Silmarillion*) states that Men were created mortal, Men believe the opposite. Their lore tells that Men were originally "*born to life everlasting, without any shadow of any end*"[33] and only

[28] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 95
[29] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 29
[30] Christopher Garbowski. "Eucatastrophe and the Gift of Ilúvatar in Middle-Earth." *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 35 (September 1997), 26
[31] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring,* 314
[32] J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Tale of the Children of Hurin*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 147
[33] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring,* 314, italics in the original

became mortal through a Fall, which was orchestrated by Melkor. Despite this difference, Finrod and Andreth come to the conclusion that the *fëar* of Men nonetheless are just guests in Arda and were already from the beginning destined to leave it once, though they do not completely understand how it would have happened before their Fall. Therefore, as going beyond this world has always been part of human nature, the current way of passing, namely through dying, should not be something to be feared: "certainly Death is not an Enemy!".[34]

This is what happened the first time the Eldar were confronted with human mortality, when Bëor the Old died at the age of ninety-three. Bëor "lay dead, of no wound or grief, but stricken by age," because he "at the last had relinquished his life willingly and passed in peace."[35] However, as Andreth states barely a century later, "all passing and dying is a grief to [the heart of Man]".[36] It was because of Melkor that there came a shadow upon death: he "confounded it with darkness, and brought forth evil out of good, and fear out of hope."[37] To dishearten Men, Morgoth proclaimed that "beyond the Circles of the World there is Nothing".[38] And by his lies, many Men came to believe that they "go out to no return" and that "death is an uttermost end, a loss irremediable".[39] Though it was thus "originally meant as a comfort and surcease after the struggles of earthly existence, death became an event to postpone and, if possible, avoid".[40] As such, though it is in their nature for Men to pass beyond this world, due to Melkor's deceit, Men started to fear death and lost hope.

Since no one in Ëa exactly knows what fate lies beyond the world for Men and after Arda for Elves and the Valar, hope and trust in Ilúvatar's design is the only remedy for fear. Of where Men go after their death, nothing is known, except that "of old the Valar declared to the Elves in Valinor that Men shall join in the Second Music of the Ainur" (that is, the recreation of the world).[41] Similarly, nothing exact is known of the fate of the Elves and Valar after the end of Arda, for their immortal lives were bound to it. Therefore, as neither Ainur, Elves nor Men know what lies beyond their end, Morgoth's lies could not be countered with knowledge and the fear of the Nothingness seemed justified. However, as Finrod reminds Andreth, "if [Men and Elves] are indeed (…) the Children of the One, then [Ilúvatar] will not suffer Himself

[34] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no.208
[35] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 140
[36] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 307
[37] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 30
[38] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Children of Hurin*, 65
[39] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 311
[40] Charles W. Nelson. *"'The Halls of Waiting': Death and Afterlife in Middle-Earth," Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts 9, no. 3 The Tolkien Issue (1998): pp. 200-211,* 206
[41] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 30

to be deprived of His own, not by any Enemy".[42] As such, he heeds Andreth to have *estel*, that is "the trust in Eru, that whatever He designed beyond the end would be recognized by each *fëa* as wholly satisfying".[43] "Within Ilúvatar's love of the Earth lies its hope".[44] Having this hope, that beyond the world and after death, there is not Nothing but something specifically designed for them by Ilúvatar, is the only antidote to Morgoth's shadow and the only way to be fearless towards death.

Immortal Men and Mortal Elves

In his description of the different natures of Elves and Men regarding their (im)mortality, Tolkien ultimately suggests the inverse. Though Elves were created immortal, they are bound to Arda. Therefore, the incredibly long "life span of the Elves (…) is nevertheless finite", because "as the world comes to its end, they will come to theirs".[45] Men on the other hand were created mortal, but just in regards to Arda: after their death, they go beyond the circles of the world to their true home, outside of Time. Because of this, they received the virtue to shape their own life. What we have here "is a reversal of the usual meanings of mortality and immortality". [46] Because, since Elves are thus only immortal as long as Arda lasts and "Ilúvatar has not revealed what he purposes for the Elves after the World's end", Elves are actually more mortal than Men. [47]

Section 1.2: Of Númenor and the Fear of Death

In the *Akallabêth*, or *The Downfall of Númenor*, J.R.R. Tolkien recounts the history of the Númenóreans, of how they were blessed by Ilúvatar with extraordinary long life and of their eventual downfall after their invasion of the Undying Lands. The common threads throughout the history of Númenor are the desire for immortality, the fear of death and the desperate and rebellious acts resulting from both.

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[42] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 316
[43] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 332
[44] Christopher Garbowski, *Eucatastrophe*, 27
[45] Kevin Aldrich. "The Sense of Time in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 15, no. 1 (October 15, 1988), 8
[46] Anna Vaninskaya. *Fantasies of Time and Death: Dunsany, Eddison, Tolkien*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.), 158
[47] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.*, 30

Of the Blessed Men

The island of Númenor was given to Elros the Half-Elf and the three houses of the Edain by Ilúvatar, together with an expanded lifetime. After the defeat of Morgoth, while the Elves were summoned back to Valinor, as a reward the men of the three faithful houses, though they stayed in Middle-Earth, "were given wisdom and power and life more enduring than any others of mortal race have possessed".[48] The Númenóreans, or Dúnedain, became like "Kings among Men" as though they did not "escape from the doom of death that Ilúvatar had set upon all Mankind, and (…) were mortal still, (…) their years were long, and they knew no sickness, ere the shadow fell upon them".[49] Moreover, a blessed island was made for them in the middle of the ocean where they established their kingdom. As the first king, Elros son of Eärendil was appointed by the Valar. Since he and his brother Elrond were descended from the Three Houses of the Edain, as well as from the Eldar and a Maia, they belonged to both the race of Elves and Men. This meant that their destiny was yet to be decided, and although the Valar "may not withdraw the gift of death, which comes to Men from Ilúvatar," in the case of the Half-Elven "Ilúvatar gave them the judgement and they judged that to the sons of Eärendil should be given choice of their own destiny". [50] Therefore, Elrond chose to stay with the Elves and the life of the Eldar was given to him, but Elros chose to remain with Men. However, with his choice, Elros was granted a great lifespan of five hundred years, ruling more than four hundred, and afterwards "all his line, the kings and lords of the royal house, had long life even according to the measure of the Númenóreans".[51]

Though the men of Númenor were thus blessed in all things, nevertheless they were forbidden to sail to far west. In their prowess, the Dúnedain built mighty ships and became great mariners "whose like shall never be again".[52] But ever they sailed eastward, because the Lords of Valinor forbade them to sail westwards towards Valinor, as Manwë does not wants them to be tempted to seek for the "Blessed Realm".[53] For if they enter the Blessed Realm, they would "become enamoured of an immortality (within the world), which was against their law, the special doom or gift of Ilúvatar (God), and which their nature could not in fact endure".[54] So, though "ever west their hearts" yearned, they wilfully obeyed the command of the Lords of the

[48] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 248
[49] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 249
[50] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 249
[51] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 250
[52] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 250
[53] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 250
[54] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 131

West.[55] Instead, in the east, they visited the shores of Middle-Earth and taught many things to the Men still living there, who revered them and always hoped for their return.

Of the Darkening of Númenor

Nevertheless, after almost two thousand years, the Númenóreans start openly questioning and rebelling against the Valar. As the years passed, the desire for everlasting life, to escape death, grew stronger as their power and glory increased, "for though the Valar had rewarded the Dúnedain with long life, they could not take from them the weariness of the world that comes at last, and they died, (…) and the span of their lives was brief in the eyes of the Eldar".[56] During the rule of Tar-Ciryatan, the twelfth king of Númenor, seeing that the Elves do have immortality and they have not, the Númenóreans, coming under the shadow of Morgoth that still lingered in the world, "began to murmur, at first in their hearts, and then in open words, against the doom of Men".[57] Manwë is grieved upon hearing these tidings and sends messengers to warn them that "it is not the land of Manwë that makes its people deathless, but the Deathless that dwell therein have hallowed the land; and there [men] would wither and grow weary the sooner, as moths in a light too strong and steadfast".[58] But as the Númenóreans would not listen to reason, more messengers are send, telling them that though it may seem that the Elves go unpunished for their rebellion, they have their own burden to carry because "they cannot escape, and are bound to this world".[59] Men, on the other hand, do not have their home within the Circles of the World and can therefore "escape, and leave the world, and are not bound to it, in hope or in weariness".[60] And thus, they ask the Númenóreans, who should envy the other? However, "it is useless for immortals to tell mortals how lucky they are to be able to leave, for Men do not wish to escape from the world; on the contrary, there is nothing they want more than to be bound to it. The burden of which the Elves speak is no burden for them, destined as they are to a fleeting end".[61] As such, the men of Númenor continue their protest that everything about their fate is based on faith and no real comfort is given. "The Númenóreans' entirely rational repudiation of 'blind trust' and 'hope without assurance', which is all that any of the Elves can

[55] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 250
[56] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 252
[57] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 252
[58] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 252
[59] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 253
[60] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 253
[61] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies,* 165

ever offer, ensures the even more certain victory of death".[62] Therefore, as is "trust is paramount in the 'gift'" of Ilúvatar to Men, refusing to live by it, is a folly.[63]

As such, the fear of death takes hold in their hearts and the bliss of Númenor diminishes. The Dúnedain were ill pleased that immortality was denied to them and it "seemed to them that they were surrounded by a great darkness, of which they were afraid".[64] Of king Tar-Atanamir, is said that he "lived to a great age, clinging to his life beyond the end of all joy; and he was the first of the Númenóreans to do this, refusing to depart until he was witless and unmanned, and denying to his son the kingship at the height of his days".[65] This is why he is "also called the Unwilling," as "he lived until death took him perforce in dotage".[66] Christopher Tolkien notes that "'clinging to life', and so in the end dying perforce and involuntarily, was one of the changes brought about by the Shadow and the rebellion of the Númenóreans; it was also accompanied by a shrinking of their natural life-span".[67] As the "fear of death grew ever darker upon them",[68] they tried to delay it by all means at their disposal. They began "to build great houses for their dead, while their wise men laboured unceasingly to discover if they might the secret of recalling life, or at the least of the prolonging of Men's days. Yet they achieved only the art of preserving incorrupt the dead flesh of Men, and they filled all the land with silent tombs in which the thought of death was enshrined in the darkness".[69] This is because "the attempt to escape [death] is wicked because 'unnatural', and silly because Death in that sense is the Gift of God, (…) release from the weariness of Time".[70] As such, the more they clung to life, the sooner death took them and the joy of life departed.

Subsequently, this also changed the mode of life and the Númenóreans became gluttonous and cruel. Those that lived tried to forget about death and "turned the more eagerly to pleasure and revelry, desiring ever more goods and more riches".[71] As a consequence the people became proud and "(…) eager for wealth, and they laid the men of Middle-earth under tribute, taking now rather than giving, (…) for their own land seemed to them shrunken, and they had no rest or content therein, and they desired now wealth and dominion in Middle-earth,

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[62] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies*, 168
[63] Christopher Garbowski, *Eucatastrophe*, 31
[64] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 253
[65] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 254
[66] J.R.R. Tolkien, Alan Lee, John Howe, and Ted Nasmith. *Unfinished Tales Illustrated Edition*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. (London: HarperCollins, 2020), 239
[67] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tale*, 243-244
[68] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 254
[69] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 254
[70] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no. 156
[71] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 254

since the West was denied".[72] In contrast to the early days when they arrived as helpers, they now landed as lords and conquerors.

Ultimately, the Númenórean fear of death completely changed the fashion of the world. In the days of King Ar-Pharazôn, Númenor rose to the zenith of its power. In their pride and prowess, they defeated Sauron and brought him as a hostage to Númenor. However, he soon became the most trusted advisor of the king, taking advantage of their fear of death. Following the advice of Sauron, Ar-Pharazôn turned his worship to the Dark Lord Melkor and "with spilling of blood and torment and great wickedness, men made sacrifices to Melkor that he should release them from Death".[73] But it was all in vain, as "for all this, Death did not depart from the land, rather it came sooner and more often, and in many dreadful guises".[74] Where before men had grown old slowly and when they were weary of the world, laid down in the end to sleep, "now madness and sickness assailed them (…) and they cursed themselves in their agony".[75] Despite the prayers and sacrifices to Melkor, even Ar-Pharazôn "felt the shadow of death approach" and was "filled with fear and wrath".[76] Sauron, who had awaited this moment, reminded the king how the Valar possessed a "land where there is no death"[77] and spurs him on to take what should be rightfully his. Ar-Pharazôn succumbs to this temptation and prepares to sail west, "going up with war against the Deathless, to wrest from them everlasting life within the Circles of the World".[78] When the army of Númenor sets foot upon the Undying Lands, Manwë called upon Ilúvatar and he "showed forth his power, and he changed the fashion of the world".[79] As a result, the island of Númenor is drowned and Arda itself is made round, forever removing the Undying Lands from the world, now unreachable by mortal means. "In a kind of grim irony, Men's fear of the unknown, their desire for continued existence within Time, (…) lead (…) to the loss also of all direct contact with the beings who embody the ideal they yearn for". [80] And thus, the unwillingness of the Númenóreans to accept their mortality not only caused their own destruction, but shaped the world thereafter forever, but not for the better.

[72] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 253-254
[73] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 261
[74] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 261
[75] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 262
[76] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 262
[77] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 262
[78] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 266
[79] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 266
[80] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies,* 167-168

Of Gondor and the Echo of Númenor

Although the Faithful escape the downfall of Númenor and establish the kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor, the Realms in Exile, their descendants eventually fall victim to the same shadow of death. Not all of the Dúnedain perish in the destruction; on a handful of ships, the Faithful, those that stayed loyal to the Valar and to their friendship with the Elves, safely escape to Middle-Earth. Here, Elendil and his sons founded the kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor. Though but an echo of the former glory of Númenor, for centuries these kingdoms flourish. However, history would repeat itself, as Faramir explained to Frodo about the decaying of Gondor that

> death was ever present, because the Númenóreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, and so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging. Kings made tombs more splendid than houses of the living and counted old names in the rolls of their descent dearer than the names of sons. Childless lords sat in aged halls musing on heraldry; in secret chambers withered men compounded strong elixirs, or in high cold towers asked questions of the stars. And the last king of the line of Anárion had no heir.[81]

As a consequence, "'the yearning for longevity, and the habit of embalming and the building of splendid tombs' keeps the Númenóreans' descendants in bondage for the rest of the Third Age".[82] When the line of kings ended, stewards took over the rule of Gondor, but "the span of their lives had now waned to little more than that of other men".[83] By the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, the city of Minas Tirith was still falling into decay, waiting for the King that would restore the days of old.

At the end of his reign, King Aragorn wilfully yields his sceptre to his son and afterwards lays down his life in the fashion of the first Kings of Númenor. At the age of 210, having reigned 122 years, Aragorn "felt the approach of old age and knew that the span of his life-days was drawing to an end".[84] Arwen pleads him not to leave before his time, as "she was not yet weary of her days, and thus she tasted the bitterness of the mortality she had taken upon her".[85] But he answered that it is "not before my time (…) for if I will not go now, then I must soon go perforce".[86] Moreover he reaffirms that he has been given "not only a span thrice that of Men of Middle-Earth, but also the grace to go at [his] will, and give back the gift".[87] Aragorn's end show that to "carry the hope that death is indeed a gift to be welcomed, not a

[81] J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. (London: HarperCollins, 2007), Book IV, Chapter 5
[82] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies,* 187
[83] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Book V, Chapter 8
[84] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[85] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[86] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[87] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V

punishment to be avoided, into the future ages of the world".[88] With this, Aragorn demonstrates that he "truly is the descendant of Elendil the Faithful"[89] and heir of the kings of old.

As she tastes the bitterness of death, Arwen finally understands the Doom of Men. About the tale of Númenor and its fall she states that "as wicked fools I scorned them, but I pity them at last".[90] In his last words to her, Aragorn very clearly expresses the duality of Men's mortality: "In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory, Farewell!" [91] With these words "Aragorn reminds her, sorrow need not turn into despair so long as any sliver of hope of something outside Time persists".[92] For in the end, this is a key-element of Tolkien's thought about the fulfilment of Men's being: to "bear the burden of the 'necessity of faith'" (unlike the Númenóreans) and to "accept death in its original nature of a gift by the One to Men, (…) a paternal call in the fullness of time and passing, serenely and willingly, to where there is 'more than memory'".[93] Following the Doom of Men, Aragorn thus gives up his mortal life to receive immortality beyond the circles of the world.

Section 1.3: Of the Lore of the Rings

Disguised as Annatar, the Lord of Gifts, Sauron deceived the great Noldorin craftsmen of Eregion into forging the great Rings of Power. During the Second Age, the smiths of Eregion, led by Celebrimbor, grandson of Fëanor, became the greatest craftsmen of their age. Desiring their downfall, Sauron disguised himself as Annatar, an emissary of the Valar, and offered the smiths his service and teachings. He taught them many things and they surpassed in knowledge and in skill all that they had ever contrived before, culminating in the forging of great rings of power. But "Sauron guided their labours, and he was aware of all that they did".[94] In secret, Sauron created the One Ring to rule all the other rings and when he wore that Ring he could "perceive all the things that were done by means of the lesser rings, and he could see and govern the very thoughts of those that wore them".[95] However, the Elves felt Sauron's presence and

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[88] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies,* 171
[89] Andrea Monda. "Death, Immortality and Their Escapes: Memory and Longevity." Essay. In *The Broken Scythe: Death and Immortality in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien,* edited by Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi, 155–73. (Zurich: Walking Tree, 2012), 165
[90] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[91] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[92] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies,* 172
[93] Giampaolo Canzonieri. "A Misplaced Envy Analogies and Differences between Elves and Men on the Idea of Pain ." Essay. In *The Broken Scythe: Death and Immortality in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi, 193–208. (Zurich: Walking Tree, 2012), 207
[94] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 275
[95] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 276

evil in the rings so "in anger and fear they took off their rings".[96] As he learns of his failure, Sauron demands the rings back, which the Elves refuse. Consequently, Sauron sacks Eregion and captures all the rings, save the three Celebrimbor had made by himself.

The Power to Fall

Above all, the Rings held in them the power to prevent or slow decay, and symbolize the Elvish struggle with their immortality. The smiths of Eregion created the rings to preserve the beauty of the West as they "desired both to stay in Middle-Earth (…) and yet enjoy the bliss of those that had departed".[97] As such, this is very much an Elvish motive of immortality (just as the escape of death is a Manish motive), for with the passing of time, they desire to halt time, preserve the beauty of old and have not the weariness of countless years weigh upon them.[98] And as they "thus became obsessed with 'fading', the mode in which the changes of time (the law of the world under the sun) was perceived by them, (…) they became sad, and their art (…) antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming".[99] For this reason they were so willingly tempted by Sauron, because "the chief power (of all the rings alike) was the prevention or slowing of *decay*, (…) the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance".[100] "Finally, behind their desire to halt time is perhaps also an unwillingness to accept their own mortality, since time will eventually bring about their end".[101] In Middle-Earth, the effect of this, can be seen most strongly in the realm of Lothlórien.

In Lothlórien, Galadriel uses her ring to preserve time and to ward off all evil. When Frodo enters Lórien, the effect of the "secret power here that holds evil from the land" is clearly visible as "no blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain".[102] Moreover, the power is even tangible, for "it seemed to [Frodo] that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world".[103] The power of Nenya, her ring, enabled Galadriel to create a timeless realm, unaffected by the surrounding world. Yet,

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[96] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 276
[97] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 276
[98] Franco Manni. "An Eulogy of Finitude: Anthropology, Eschatology and Philosophy of History in Tolkien." Essay. In *The Broken Scythe: Death and Immortality in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi, 5–38. (Zurich: Walking Tree, 2012), 14
[99] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 131
[100] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 131
[101] Kevin Aldrich, "Sense of Time", 8
[102] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book II, Chapter 6
[103] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book II, Chapter 6

it was not entirely natural and at their departure, to Frodo it seemed "a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time".[104]

Nevertheless, though the Eldar were tempted by this power, in the end they did not fall as they willingly accepted (and contributed to) their fading. Though Sauron never touched the three rings, they were still bound to his power as it was by his lore that Celebrimbor created them. As the Elves thus sought the power to overcome their nature in Sauron's legacy, Tolkien states in one of his letters that in the forging of the rings "the Elves came their nearest to falling to 'magic' and machinery".[105] And in their sphere of (ultimately unnatural) preservation the Eldar lived, until the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. If Frodo would succeed in his quest to destroy the One Ring, also "the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten".[106] Yet, as Glorfindel states during the Council of Elrond, "all the Elves are willing to endure this chance, (…) if by it the power of Sauron may be broken".[107] Similarly, when Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring, though she is tempted, she ultimately resists, fully aware that she will now diminish "and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away (…) slowly to forget and to be forgotten".[108] "Galadriel has willingly forfeited a chance that will never come again".[109] If she had taken it, she would have had the power to preserve the beauty of the world forever, but "beautiful beyond enduring".[110] She acknowledges this when she proclaimed that "all shall love [her] and despair!"[111] Nevertheless, despite the temptation, Galadriel is willing to accept her fate because "that what should be shall be".[112]

Nine for Mortal Men doomed to die

But not only the elves were attracted to the rings as Sauron also successfully tempted men with their power. After Sauron obtained the Rings of Power from the ruins of Eregion, he used them to dominate the other races. Nine rings he gave to men, "for Men proved in this matter as in others the readiest to his will".[113] Those to whom he gave the rings "became mighty in their

[104] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 8
[105] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no. 131
[106] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 2
[107] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 2
[108] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 7
[109] Wayne A. Chandler and Carrol L. Fry. "Tolkien's Allusive Backstory: Immortality and Belief in the Fantasy Frame," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 35, no. 2 (April 15, 2017): pp. 95-113, 102.
[110] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 7
[111] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 7
[112] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book II, Chapter 7
[113] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 276

day, kings, sorcerers, and warriors of old".[114] It is said that among them "three were great lords of Númenórean race".[115] Tempted by the prospect of "immortality in order to enjoy forever the glory and wealth that the power of the rings' magic has given them" they fell under Sauron's spell.[116] Though they "obtained glory and great wealth, (…) it turned to their undoing".[117] Driven by their fear of death and desire to escape it, they followed "a path of Fall, Death and Machine".[118] One by one, they all fell to the domination of the One Ring and became the Nazgûl, or Ringwraiths, Sauron's most terrible servants.

For men, the rings had the power to ward off death, but this came at the cost of natural life. Just like the three rings, the nine prevented any decay, including death, and thus granted the wearer a deathless life. However, as Gandalf explains to Frodo, though a mortal "who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, (…) he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness".[119] Accordingly, the wearers of the nine rings "had, as it seemed, unending life, yet life became unendurable for them".[120] This was a "false immortality (…) as it was merely a deadly and everlasting lengthening of days so that life grew wearisome beyond belief as the consolation of death (the Gift of Men from Ilúvatar) was denied".[121] Moreover, the rings enabled them to walk "unseen by all eyes in this world beneath the sun, and they could see things in worlds invisible to mortal men".[122] Eventually, by this "two-fold 'gift' of the ring, longevity and invisibility,"[123] they faded, became for ever invisible "and they entered into the realm of shadows".[124] The power of the rings turned them into horrible, beyond-human creatures who lived as ghosts in the dark, as by "using the Nine Rings, the Nazgûl (…) lose part of their human nature to become wraiths".[125] Thus, neither truly alive nor truly dead, the Nazgûl lived a terrible "non-existence or non-life".[126] All who faced them recognized the Ringwraiths' foul nature: when Éowyn challenged the Witch-King, she called him "living or dark undead"[127] and Faramir describes them to Frodo as "living

[114] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 278
[115] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 255
[116] Alberto Ladavas, *Sub-Creator*, 127
[117] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 278
[118] Alberto Ladavas, *Sub-Creator*, 127
[119] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 2
[120] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 278
[121] Charles W. Nelson, *"Halls of Waiting", 209.*
[122] J.R.R Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 277
[123] Andrea Monda, "Memory and Longevity", 163
[124] J.R.R Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 277
[125] Alberto Ladavas, *Sub-Creator*, 128
[126] Alberto Ladavas, *Sub-Creator*, 129
[127] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Book V, Chapter 6

ghosts"[128] and their dwelling place as "Imlad Morgul, the Valley of Living Death".[129] Though they went where no man went before, they lost their humanity in the process.

One Ring for… Hobbits

Though being much sturdier in resisting the evil power of the Ring, even Hobbits are subject to its effect: while the One Ring gave Sméagol above-human senses and life-span, at the same time, it turned him into the despicable creature Gollum. Of all the people to have worn the Ring besides Sauron, Sméagol had it the longest. Unsurprisingly, he was also affected by it substantially. Not only did the Ring "[lengthen] his years far beyond their span" to that of "many lives of his small kind,"[130] it also enhanced his senses and abilities. He became "sharp-eyed and keen-eared,"[131] developed night vision and could climb on impossible surfaces. However, though he did not fade like the Nazgûl due to his Hobbit-nature, he did not change for the better. Living a lonely existence in dark caves near deep pools, he became weary of the sun. Tolkien clearly emphasises that Sméagol is losing his human traits as he tells that when Sméagol fled for the sun, he "wormed his way like a maggot into the heart of the hills;".[132] And when he chased Frodo and Sam through Emyn Muil, he climbed "like some large prowling thing of insect-kind".[133] As such, Sméagol became Gollum, old and wretched.

Furthermore, in his years of solitude with the Ring, Gollum develops a split personality, who often quarrel amongst themselves. In those lone years, the Ring brought to Gollum unnatural long life and for five hundred years it poisoned his mind.[134] As the Ring took full possession of him, he started calling it his 'Precious'. Eventually, he identifies "with it so closely that he also refers to himself as 'my Precious'. That is, he becomes so deluded as to think of himself no longer as an individual, as 'I', but rather as a duo, as 'we'".[135] During their journey to Mordor, Sam named this duo 'Slinker' and 'Stinker'.[136] His Gollum-personality/Stinker was completely enthralled by the Ring, while his Sméagol-personality/Slinker still vaguely remembered his former self. Because he knew what the Ring made him do, while it also was all that he cared for, "he hated [the Ring] and loved it, as he

[128] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers,* Book IV, Chapter 6
[129] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers,* Book IV, Chapter 7
[130] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book II, Chapter 2
[131] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 2
[132] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 2
[133] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers,* Book IV, Chapter 1
[134] Peter Jackson. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. [Extended Edition] New Line Cinema, 2001, 0:06:27
[135] Ralph C. Wood. *Tolkien among the Moderns*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015)
[136] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers,* Book IV, Chapter 3

hated and loved himself".[137] Therefore, he often quarrelled with himself as his life became altogether wretched.

Less unfortunate was the fate of Bilbo, though he also was subjected to the weariness of his prolonged life given to him by the Ring. At the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo celebrates his magnificent eleventy-first birthday, which was "old even for Hobbits, who reached a hundred as often as not".[138] However, having possessed the One Ring for 60 years, time seemed to have had almost no effect on him: "At ninety he was much the same as at fifty. At ninety-nine they began to call him *well-preserved*; but *unchanged* would have been nearer the mark".[139] Without being aware of the preserving power of the Ring, Bilbo nevertheless acknowledges his weariness and restlessness:

> I am old, Gandalf. I don't look it, but I am beginning to feel it in my heart of hearts. *Well-preserved* indeed! (…) Why, I feel all thin, sort of stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread. That can't be right. I need a change, or something.[140]

Desiring for a place "where [he] can *rest*" and "finish [his] book",[141] he plans to leave the Shire and travel east. Despite his seemingly endless youth, he has already thought of a nice ending for his book: "*and he lived happily ever after to the end of his days*".[142] For that is, according to Bilbo as well as Tolkien, how all good stories should end.

Section 1.4: Tolkien's Nature of Death

Through the story of the Downfall of Númenor as well as that of the Rings of Power, Tolkien clearly shows the terrible consequences of trying to escape death and time. What each race so desperately tries to reach is exactly what the other is trying to avoid: Men seek immorality, Elves seek to escape from the world. By refusing to accept what has been given to them, Men and Elves "rebel against the laws of the Creator". [143] And herein lies "perhaps the most powerful temptation for both men and Elves in Tolkien's world" as they would like "to deal with death and time on their own terms rather than the Creator's." [144] Tolkien makes it evident through both tales that "immortality, for naturally mortal creatures, is evil" and nothing good will come from desiring it, let alone, reaching for it. [145] As the Númenórean life-span waned and the Nazgûl

[137] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 2
[138] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring, Prologue, Of the Ordering of the Shire*
[139] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 1
[140] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 1
[141] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 1
[142] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 1
[143] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 131
[144] Kevin Aldrich, "Sense of Time", 5
[145] Wayne A. Chandler and Carrol L. Fry, "Allusive Backstory", 101

faded despite their effort, it is clear that by trying to escape death "more life cannot be gained this way, only the drawing out of the great struggle to the point where it is meaningless".[146] Time and time again, Tolkien makes it painfully clear that "there is no escape *from* death except *through* death, if at all" and "that if true happiness is to be found by mortals, it will be found not in time but in eternity."[147] If life is prolonged, all that remains is weariness where there could have been a 'happily ever after to the end of their days'.

To emphasize this, Tolkien presents characters that do not rebel against their nature but accept their fate as it is. Both Aragorn and Elros recognise the gift they have been given, "treating [their] own life as a stewardship, which [they] faithfully [surrender] at the proper time" [148]; Galadriel forgoes the possibility that would have halted time for ever and finally accepts her fading, after ages of rebellion; and Bilbo relinquishes the One Ring "in the end of his own accord".[149] What Tolkien praises especially in the way these characters deal with death is their acceptance. After leaving Lothlórien, Legolas tells to Gimli: "your loss you suffer of your own free will".[150] Similarly for Tolkien, part of Men's gift of freedom is to freely give it back and 'suffer' that loss without fear, for "we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory"[151] Therefore, "the ability to relinquish life and what one loves in it, freely and not perforce, is reaffirmed as the only correct 'fulfilment of [Men's] being'".[152] Thus, Tolkien's philosophy of death is one of '*estel*', of hope.

[146] Rebekah Hunt. "Beyond the Circles of the World: Death and the West in Tolkien's Middle-earth Legendarium." In *Proceedings of the 2nd Mythgard Institute Mythmoot*, 1–13. (Bedford, NH: Signum University, 2013), 7
[147] Kevin Aldrich, "Sense of Time", 9
[148] Rebekah Hunt, "Circles of the World", 9
[149] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 2
[150] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book II, Chapter 8
[151] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[152] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies*, 172

CHAPTER 2: EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism deals pre-eminently, as its name suggests, with the major questions of human existence, and is thus largely concerned with the meaning and value of life as well as the role of death. Though Existentialism was popularized after the Second World War by French philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, in the Germanic speaking world, it had already a considerate foothold.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I will discuss some existentialist ideas on death and immortality, based on the works of two of its founding fathers, namely Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who worked before or during Tolkien's time. For Kierkegaard, I will analyse his concept of despair as a living death and how death plays a vital role in finding eternal life; for Heidegger, I will look at his concept of being-towards-death and why man's mortality is the essential reason why one can give meaning to his life. In the last sections, I will compare their works to that of J.R.R. Tolkien and conclude whether (and if so, how) he was influenced by these existential thinkers.

Section 2.1: Kierkegaard's Living Death

Although Søren Kierkegaard lived almost a century before existentialism became popular with the general public, he is retrospectively considered to be the first existentialist thinker. As a defender of (what would later be known as) Christian Existentialism, his philosophy has had a major influence on almost all existentialists after him, especially Heidegger.

The Torment of Despair

In his book *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), Kierkegaard discusses the concept of death. He bases his treatise on the passage in John 11: 4 where Jesus states about Lazarus that "this sickness is not unto death"[153] and yet Lazarus dies. He asks himself if *this* sickness is not unto death even though Lazarus died, what sickness *is* unto death? "For, humanly speaking, death is the last thing of all; and humanly speaking, there is hope only so long there is life".[154] However, he continues, "Christianly understood death is by no means the last thing of all, hence it is only a little event within that which is all, an eternal life"[155] and must thus conclude that in this regard

[153] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, John 11:4
[154] Søren Kierkegaard. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 194), 12
[155] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 12

not even death is a sickness unto death, nor anything else which is considered "earthly and temporal suffering".[156] So since this sickness is thus nothing of the body, it must be something of the spirit. Because "spirit is the self"[157] Kierkegaard comes to the conclusion that the sickness unto death must be a sickness of the self (the own-most part of one's being).

This sickness, or "disrelationship"[158], in how the self relates to itself, is what Kierkegaard identifies as 'despair' and it is the worst possible state for the self to be in (as the self should not be in disrelation to itself). Considering that despair is a state of being and not something that 'happens' to the self (as a sickness would 'happen' to the body), every moment the self is in that state of despair, it is experiencing it as intensely as if it was originally contracted. Kierkegaard explains that "this comes from the fact that despair is a qualification of spirit, that it is related to the eternal in man. But the eternal he cannot get rid of, no, not to all eternity; he cannot cast it from him once for all, nothing is more impossible;".[159] If man would not be eternal, despair would consume the soul as sickness of the body consumes the body, and because despair is unable to, Kierkegaard states, Socrates proved the immortality of the soul. But even though it cannot consume or end the soul, despair will torment the soul as if it were able to end it. It therefore puts the soul in a continuous terminal state without the power to definitively end its existence.

Paradoxically, this lack of power is exactly what gives despair its tormenting effect. The impotency of this self-consumption is a higher form of self-consumption. Kierkegaard remarks that "the fact that despair does not consume him is so far from being any comfort to the despairing man that it is precisely the opposite, this comfort is precisely the torment, it is precisely this that keeps the gnawing pain alive and keeps life in the pain. This precisely is the reason why he despairs - not to say despaired - because he cannot consume himself, cannot get rid of himself, cannot become nothing".[160] This is what Kierkegaard calls a "tormenting contradiction, this sickness of the self" and he further describes it as "perpetually to be dying, to die and yet not to die, to die death. For to die signifies that all is over, but to die death means to experience dying" [161], which can accurately be understood as a state of "living death".[162]

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[156] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 12
[157] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 17
[158] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 21
[159] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 23
[160] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 26
[161] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 25
[162] Patrick Stokes, and Adam Buben. Introduction. In *Kierkegaard and Death*, 1–20. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 22

Moreover, since despair is thus already a state of living death, death offers no means of escape. Though a despairing man can be regarded "mortally ill", for him "death is not the last phase of the sickness, but death is continually the last".[163] Therefore, "to be delivered from this sickness by death is an impossibility"[164] because a continuous death of the self is already part of despair. Moreover, to be sick unto death specifically is "not to be able to die—yet not as though there were hope of life; no, the hopelessness in this case is that even the last hope, death, is not available. When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life; but when one becomes acquainted with an even more dreadful danger, one hopes for death. So when the danger is so great that death has become one's hope, despair is the disconsolateness of not being able to die".[165] As an illustration, Kierkegaard states in *Either/Or* (1843) that "the Unhappiest One is one who is consigned to wander perpetually in his longing to rest in the grave, that awaits and yet remains continually elusive to him".[166] Such a person in despair is thus "doomed to a living death precisely by being condemned to a deathless life",[167] extending upon the paradoxical torment of this living death.

Since the self is eternal, and thus immortal, there is no avoiding this living death of despair. Once the self is in this state of living death, there is no easy escape from it. If one would try to evade his despair by ignoring it, that is "refusing to become conscious of the self",[168] he would only succeed for a short while. For though the eternal in man, as Kierkegaard states, is "the greatest concession made to man" and is what gives man a self, at the same time, it is therefore also "eternity's demand upon him".[169] And thus, through this claim, "however thoroughly [despair] eludes the attention of the despairer," at some point "eternity nevertheless will make it manifest that his situation was despair, and it will so nail him to himself that the torment nevertheless remains that he cannot get rid of himself, and it becomes manifest that he was deluded in thinking that he succeeded".[170] As ineffective despair is in trying to consume the self, so is any attempt made by the self to evade itself or its despair.

Therefore, once the self is in this state of despair, according to Kierkegaard, it is unable to deliver itself but through faith. Since the living death of despair is (by definition) devoid of

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[163] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 30
[164] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 30
[165] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 25
[166] Simon D. Podmore. "To Die and Yet Not Die: Kierkegaard's Theophany of Death." Essay. In *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben, 44–64. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 48
[167] George Connell. "Knights and Knaves of the Living Dead: Kierkegaard's Use of Living Death as a Metaphor for Despair." Essay. In *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben, 21–43. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 23
[168] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 51
[169] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 31
[170] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 30-31

all hope, as there is escape neither through death nor by evasion, "salvation is humanly speaking the most impossible thing of all".[171] Because if there was any glimmer of a possibility of escape, there would be hope. Since the self thus has no means of escape, the possibility of deliverance must come from an external source. For Kierkegaard, that source is God, as "for God all things are possible!".[172] For the self, this is where the "fight of faith" comes in, as it is faith through which the self, contrary to its own impossibility, "fights madly (…) for possibility".[173] And it is only this external possibility that has the power to deliver the self from despair and bring peace.

The Promise of Life by Accepting Death

Moreover, despair is actually not only the disrelationship of the self to itself, but also the disrelationship of the self to the power that created it. Ever since the Fall of Man, no man is by himself in a good relationship with its creator. Kierkegaard states that "as a sinner, man is separated from God by a yawning qualitative abyss".[174] As it is the eternal in man that defines his self (as discussed before), and God is the creator that gave man this eternal quality, it is thus actually God who defines a man's self. So, as long as there is an abyss between them, there is "a profound misrelation between self and *God*".[175] Because of this, the self is unable to fully be or know itself and is continuously stuck in a "primal reality of the unrealized self".[176] As such, "the absence of the face of the Divine Beloved means an arid living death".[177] Only when the relation between God and man is restored, by becoming "a self *before God*", can the self thus be delivered from the living death of despair.[178]

However, a self is unable to be a self *before God* and live. Since God is infinite, when coming before God, the self is confronted with its nothingness. Kierkegaard exclaims "what an infinite reality this self acquires by being before God!".[179] Before God, a self may easily be "crushed by the thought that [it is] a nothing and [its] soul lost in infinite space".[180] As such, "the recognition that there is a Wholly Other God before whose numinous gaze one is accountable may in fact cause the self to feel, even more acutely than [through its despair], the

[171] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 59
[172] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 59
[173] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 59
[174] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 199
[175] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 50
[176] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 50
[177] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 53
[178] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 50
[179] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 127
[180] Søren Kierkegaard. *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*. Edited by Howard V Hong, Edna H Hong, and Gregor Malantschuk. 4. Vol. 4. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 50-51

living death of its separation from the eternal, the abyssal depth and breadth of the 'infinite qualitative difference' between self and God".[181] Here, Kierkegaard draws upon the Biblical notion about God that, as God explained himself to Moses in Exodus 33: 20, "thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live".[182] In its despairing state, no man can endure seeing the Holy countenance of God, because nothing worldly or sinful can exist (let alone, live) in His presence. As such, "the sinner becomes 'like one dying,' unable to gaze upon the God in whom one sought salvation".[183] Thus, every self that tries to become a self *before God* will first need to face death.

Nevertheless, only through dying to the self can a self live before God, but not without facing the risk of annihilation. When a self comes before God, everything worldly in it will (and must) die in the presence of God. By dying, the self will be transformed, for "as gold is purified in fire, in the same way the Christian is purified"[184] to become holy before God. As such, for Kierkegaard, "it is only through undergoing a spiritual self-denial – a death of the self (…) – that the individual can become a self before God. By dying to the self (…) one will be saved from the prospect of dying before God".[185] This purification, however, "at the same time (...) both promise[s] life and threaten[s] death to the self".[186] For "yet a mortal danger remains in the apparent prospect that not everyone who enters into this combustible tension between humanity and God will emerge transformed by the metamorphosis of spirit. 'Spirit is fire,' but there is, Kierkegaard warns, always a danger in casting oneself to the flames: 'not all are burned out to spirit, a few are burned out to ashes – that is, they do not become spirit in the fire'".[187] Undergoing this purification before God is thus not without risk, as the self might truly die, nor without cost, as the self really needs to die to itself. However, at the same time, when this risk is taken, nothing is a greater reward for the self than to be before God and live. Therefore, only through "the act of dying to one's (sinful or despairing) self",[188] and "at the paradoxical cost of annihilation"[189], can a self become a self before God and live eternal life.

As such, it is only the willing acceptance of (the possibility of) one's own death that will lead to life without despair. When one is confronted with being before God, the self is either willing or unwilling to die to itself to become a self before God. Here, Kierkegaard draws upon

[181] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 51
[182] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*
[183] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 52
[184] Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 251
[185] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 57
[186] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 52
[187] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 58
[188] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 62
[189] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 53

another Biblical notion, as Jesus states that "he that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal"[190] and "for whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it".[191] When a self is unwilling to lose his life out of "the fear of death or annihilation before the Holy",[192] it will keep it, but only in a state of living death, devoid of God's presence. But when a self is willing, it will stand before God and there die to itself and be purified. It is in this "movement of faith", that the self will receive "forgiveness and acceptance, which finally delivers the self from the abyssal despair (…) of death".[193] "To die unto the world and unto the 'worldly' self, which in despair wills to be itself without God, thus involves a willingness to undergo the radical and mortally precarious metamorphosis of spirit".[194] Thus, though it may seem that by not willingly dying before God, the self has saved its life, it has actually condemned itself to an eternal living death. It is only by willingly accepting the reality and need of dying, that the self can go "into the illuminating and salvific light of living transparently *before God*".[195] Therefore, according to Kierkegaard, it is the self that willingly lays down its life that will actually live life to the fullest.

Section 2.2: Heidegger's Being-towards-Death

Martin Heidegger was very much influenced by the works of Kierkegaard, especially with the latter's views on how one should relate to one's death. Building upon Kierkegaard's idea of the acceptance of death, Heidegger formulated his own authentic being-towards-death. Moreover, given that Heidegger's account of death "is one of the most controversial and difficult in the history of philosophy's dealings with the topic,"[196] this analysis would not be complete without him.

The 'Not-yet' of Death

In his work, Heidegger aimed at understanding human existence in its entirety, challenging more traditional views. In traditional Western philosophy, philosophers "tended to assume that

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[190] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version,* John 12:25
[191] *The Bible: Authorized King James Version,* Luke 9:24
[192] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 62
[193] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 60
[194] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 57
[195] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 51
[196] Adam Buben. "Death in Being and Time" Essay. In *Meaning and Mortality in Kierkegaard and Heidegger: Origins of the Existential Philosophy of Death*, 92–108. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 92

anything that exists – whether it be a tool, a rock, a work of art, or a human being – must be regarded as a substance of some sort, where substance is understood as that which underlies and remains constant through change".[197] Heidegger opposed the idea that existence must "be conceived in terms of enduring presence", as well as the resulting "conception of ourselves as individuals with (…) an inbuilt 'personal identity' enduring through time"[198] In his magnum opus *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger defines human existence, or, as he calls it in German, *Dasein*, in a completely different way. He starts by looking at everyday events of human life "in familiar contexts of action, prior to reflection and theorizing".[199] As humans are so interconnected with the world around them and with others, through actions and relations, that there hardly exists a sharp line between them, Heidegger comes to the conclusion that "to be human is to be an unfolding *event*"[200] instead of an unchanging substance. Since the *being* of an event is determined not only by what is happening, but more so by the culmination or outcome, its defining factor is the complete "unfolding of the event 'from start to finish'".[201] Similarly, Heidegger states that Dasein can only be defined when looked at "from its 'beginning' to its 'end'",[202] thus from birth up to (and including!) death.

However, because Dasein could otherwise only be defined after it ceases to exist, Heidegger concludes that there must be another way of defining death. If Dasein is defined by its end, Dasein and its definition can never coexist, because "as long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding"[203] and it is thus not the end. This would be a bizarre conclusion, for it "seems to suggest that we can grasp Dasein's being only when it has actually become a whole - that is, when its life has run its course and it has reached death, (…) its being has terminated and Dasein no longer is".[204] However, one of the things that is still outstanding as long as one is alive, is the end itself. Because of that, "death is notoriously difficult to get a handle on since once it happens there is no longer Dasein".[205] So, as to understand death as something purely outstanding makes Dasein impossible to define in its wholeness, Heidegger

[197] Charles Guignon. "Becoming a Self: The Role of Authenticity in Being and Time." Essay. In *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre*, 119–32. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 119
[198] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 120
[199] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 120
[200] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 120
[201] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 127
[202] Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1962, 276
[203] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 276
[204] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 127
[205] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time", 93

therefore "must offer an account of death's impending nature that does not make this same mistake".[206]

Because of the impending nature of death and the always present reality of human mortality, Dasein is continuously affected by the possibility of its end. Even as something yet to be, death, as the end of Dasein, already "limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein".[207] In daily life, being aware of their own mortality, people will "spend [their] lives weighing risks and taking chances (or not) in the shadow of its ever-present possibility".[208] Though the exact timing of death is unknown, the fact that it will happen is certain. As such, because of "the constant danger of premature death",[209] human existence is permanently overshadowed by the possibility of death. Therefore, death is not just limited to the end of Dasein, but can already be found throughout Dasein's whole existence as a looming threat and a constant motivator.

Though death is thus already present while Dasein still is, it is actually the 'not-yet' of the death still to come that defines Dasein. As death already is, though it has not yet come, it must thus "not be seen as some kind of event standing before us, but rather as a way of being that (…) we always in some sense 'are'".[210] Heidegger states that "just as Dasein *is* already its 'not-yet', and is its 'not-yet' constantly as long as it is, it *is* already its end too. The 'ending' which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [*Zu-Ende-sein*], but a Being-towards-the-end [*Sein zum Ende*]".[211] As long as Dasein exists, it is moving towards its end. Because of that, its end (i.e. its death) is ever present in Dasein, specifically because it has not yet happened. If its end was to happen, Dasein itself would no longer be. Heidegger therefore suggests that we should "think of death (…) as a way of being of Dasein,"[212] specifically a being-towards-death. As a result, "since [Dasein is] always [its] death, in the sense of being towards it,"[213] Dasein and death can now coexist. Thus, by regarding death "as a way to be", Heidegger solves the problem of death's impending nature and thus is

[206] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time", 95
[207] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 277
[208] Adam Buben. "Heidegger and the Supposed Meaninglessness of Personal Immortality." *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2, no. 3 (2016), 388
[209] Adam Buben, *Meaninglessness*, 388
[210] Patrick Stokes, and Adam Buben. Introduction. In *Kierkegaard and Death, 12*
[211] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 245
[212] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 127
[213] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time", 94

able to "reveal Dasein in (…) its 'wholeness'".[214] It is therefore "Heidegger's central claim that being-towards-death will give us a way of understanding the totality of Dasein's being".[215]

The Authentic Anticipation of Death

For Heidegger, Dasein as a being-towards-death signals that life is defined by always moving forward. Just like death, everything that not yet is, stands before Dasein as a possibility. In that sense, being-towards-death is only one of the possibilities Dasein is being towards, though it is one that is always there as long as Dasein is. As there is always at least one possibility that Dasein is being-towards, Dasein is in a constant state of being-towards-a-possibility. And since being 'towards' something means that there is motion involved, Dasein is also in a constant forward movement. As such, Dasein is continuously "moving into and relating to its (…) future".[216] Therefore, "the idea of existence as a *being-towards*", as Heidegger states, "helps to clarify the conception of human existence as a future-directed 'projection' towards realizing certain possibilities," but also that Dasein must thus "involve an experience of life's going somewhere or adding up to something".[217] Consequently, Dasein is "always already under way towards making something of its life as a totality" and towards "achieving some configuration of meaning as a whole".[218] Therefore, because Dasein is always at least being-towards-death, existence is always a moving-forward towards a possibility.

Additionally, it is the realization granted by being-towards-death, that Dasein's possibilities are limited by death which gives meaning to those possibilities. Since, as being-towards-death explicitly entails, life is finite, at some point death will be "the absolute impossibility of Dasein".[219] As such, existence is only a finite moving-forward towards finite possibilities. However, "in facing up to the inevitability of death, one can *choose* among the possibilities open to one with a heightened degree of clarity about the importance and gravity of one's choices".[220] Therefore, it is by recognizing that the totality of one's possibilities is thus limited, that one will "live in such a way that, in each of [its] actions, [it] express[es] a lucid understanding of where [its] life is going – of how things are adding up as a whole".[221]

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[214] Patrick Stokes, and Adam Buben, *Introduction, 12*
[215] Charles Guignon. "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death: The Existentiell and the Existential." Essay. In *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben, 184–203. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 195
[216] Adam Buben, *Meaninglessness,* 391
[217] Charles Guignon, "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death", 195
[218] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 127
[219] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 294
[220] Charles Guignon, "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death", 198
[221] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 130

Heidegger states that only then "one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among those (…) possibilities lying ahead".[222] Consequently, specifically the fact that Dasein's possibilities are limited by an inevitable end, is what makes choosing-correctly precious.

Nevertheless, it is not the realization of these possibilities that defines Dasein, but rather the capacity to engage them. As discussed, the main impending possibility of Dasein is its end. However, "being-towards-death (…) is one case of 'being towards a possibility' in which there is no such thing as actualizing what one is 'towards'".[223] If Dasein would actualize this 'towards', it would be no more and "once [Dasein is] dead [it] cannot be 'towards' anything" anymore.[224] Because this central being-towards can never be actualized, it cannot be that it is the actualization of possibilities that defines Dasein. Moreover, since the finitude of Dasein is a given and the only uncertainty is the 'when', "being-towards-death means proceeding into possibilities with no guarantee of completing or actualizing any of them".[225] This too adds up to the conclusion that it cannot be the finalization "that allow[s] Dasein to find itself meaningful, but rather its capacity for engaging in them".[226] The fulfilment of these possibilities is thus "not in the sense of colouring in all the spaces of a life, but in the sense of realizing a potentiality-for-being that is definitive of Dasein's being".[227] Therefore, the being-towards of Dasein has nothing to do with the completion of these possibilities, but everything with reaching forward into them (that is, anticipating them).

It is the anticipation of death, the authentic being-towards-death, that gives Dasein a freedom of being. Heidegger states that "since anticipation of [death] discloses also all the possibilities which lie ahead of that possibility, this anticipation includes the possibility of taking the *whole* of Dasein in advance (…) that is to say, it includes the possibility of existing as a *whole potentiality-for-Being*".[228]Just like death is always present, so are all other possibilities. Nevertheless, only by being-towards-death (i.e., anticipating death) is one "able to see possibilities '*as* possibilities,' something we *choose*".[229] Heidegger affirms that "the certain possibility of death (…) discloses Dasein as possibility".[230] The central role of death is

[222] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 308
[223] Charles Guignon, "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death.", 197
[224] Charles Guignon, "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death", 197
[225] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time.", 103
[226] Adam Buben, *Meaninglessness,* 392
[227] Charles Guignon, "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death", 199-200
[228] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 309
[229] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 130
[230] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 264

that "whereas any other possibilities and projects can be finished or given up, one can never actualize or be done with [death]. Once Dasein realizes this in anticipation, it becomes clear that no particular possibility, other than Being-towards-death, is essential to Dasein (…) and so, Dasein recognizes its freedom before all of the possibilities that are (…) available to it so long as it is".[231] As it is thus not the outcome of actions or choices that makes Dasein whole, but only one's own anticipation and potentiality, no extrinsic factor has any defining influence on Dasein. It is only Dasein itself that can do this, for as "it is one's own self that becomes an issue in this way of encountering death, there is a sense in which one must stand alone in anticipation, independent of relationships with other Dasein and things in the world. (…) The anticipation of death, therefore, leads Dasein to take responsibility for itself".[232] And such is the freedom that results from seeing Dasein as possibility, that one is "somewhat undefined as to the specific content of its existence"[233] and spared "from ever being essentially determined by any particular possibilities or ways of understanding".[234] With the revelation that existence is thus essentially neither predetermined nor predefined by some external force, we can start to "see our lives as something we are defining through our choices".[235] In Heidegger's philosophy, it is therefore essentially the mortality of man that enables him to give meaning to his life.

Section 2.3: Tolkien's Estel

Though Tolkien (to the extent of my knowledge and research) never explicitly stated to have read Kierkegaard's or Heidegger's works, it is likely that Tolkien was at least familiar with them, specifically by the virtue of his fellow-Inkling Charles Williams. In England not much interest was paid to the developments of Continental philosophy; it was rather opposed by a philosophical movement which "came to be known as 'Oxford' philosophy".[236] Nevertheless, "one spark of interest in Kierkegaard's work could have been observed in England, and that was the editorial effort of Charles Williams at the Oxford University Press".[237] Charles Williams (1886-1945), member of the Inklings and good friend of J.R.R. Tolkien, became intensely involved with the works of Kierkegaard and subsequently "set out on a one-man crusade to get as much of it as possible into translation and into print".[238] The first print was

[231] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time", 102
[232] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time", 102
[233] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time", 101
[234] Adam Buben, "Death in Being and Time", 103
[235] Charles Guignon, "Becoming a Self", 130
[236] Alastair Hannay, Gordon Daniel Marino, and Roger Poole. "The Unknown Kierkegaard" Essay. In *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 48–75. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57
[237] Alastair Hannay, Gordon Daniel Marino, and Roger Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard", 57
[238] Alastair Hannay, Gordon Daniel Marino, and Roger Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard", 57

finished in 1938 and almost a dozen publications later, *The Sickness unto Death* followed in 1941.[239] Since the members of The Inklings shared their literary interests with each other, it is highly likely that Williams shared his love of Kierkegaard also with Tolkien.

Regardless, Tolkien's Legendarium exhibits many existential themes. As shown in Chapter 1, whether it is *The Quenta Silmarillion*, the *Akallabêth*, *The Lord of the Rings* or even the Appendices, for Tolkien, the way Elves and Men deal with their respective (im)mortality is always a driving force of action. Furthermore, Tolkien's 'Gift of Ilúvatar to Men' closely resembles Heidegger's freedom of being. During the creation, Tolkien explicitly states that Men have the ability to shape their life and that "it is one with this gift of freedom that the children of Men dwell only a short space in the world alive".[240] In correspondence with Heidegger's philosophy, the freedom of Men to give meaning to their life in Middle-Earth is thus linked to their mortality. Moreover, in the Legendarium, the fate of Middle-Earth is largely determined by the creational Music of the Ainur. Though the immortal Valar and Elves brought into being wonders of immeasurable beauty, these were all 'just' the materialization of what was already destined to be by the *Ainulindalë*. However, as Tolkien illustrates by Morgoth's fear of Túrin and the fact that Manwë had to call upon Ilúvatar to prevent Ar-Pharazôn's invasion of Valinor, clearly the freedom of Men to shape their own life surpasses even the power of the immortals. As such, mirroring Heidegger's idea that mankind's existence is not predefined by any external force, in Middle-Earth Men also can give meaning to their lives beyond the Music, beyond the fate of the world.

Shadows of despair

While Kierkegaard used a living death only as an abstract metaphor, in the mythical world of Middle-Earth it is a 'physical' reality. Amongst the many mythical creatures in Middle-Earth, wraiths are easily the most detestable. As they are neither dead nor alive, Tolkien clearly expresses that their entire existence is evil and unnatural[241]. In Middle-Earth, becoming a wraith is always accompanied by some form of evil – fear, disobedience, desire - as well as by inner conflict. To illustrate this, Tolkien often uses the concept of despair to describe their terrible form of living. As I will exemplify below, Tolkien draws (quite successfully) upon Kierkegaard's metaphor of despair in the shaping of his wraiths.

[239] Alastair Hannay, Gordon Daniel Marino, and Roger Poole, "The Unknown Kierkegaard", 57
[240] J.R.R Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 30
[241] Tom Shippey. *The Road to Middle-Earth*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003), 146-150

Of the wraiths in Middle-Earth, the Nine Ringwraiths are most heavily associated with despair. Upon receiving the Rings of Power, their desire for immortality was fulfilled. But when life consequently became unendurable, their only means of escape (i.e. death) was rendered powerless by the same object that made their life unbearable in the first place. As such, for the Nazgûl, the Rings of Power can be regarded as a *sickness unto death*. Therefore, by "not to be able to die - yet not as though there were hope of life",[242] their existence is completely devoid of hope. In their despairing life, they are in a constant inner conflict, paradoxically "desiring and hating" all other "living things".[243] For the Nazgûl, this disrelation with the self is so destructive that they even become beacons of despair: wherever they go, they instil fear and despair in the hearts of men. When the gates of Minas Tirith were breached, the first to enter was "the Lord of the Nazgûl, (…) grown to a vast menace of despair, (…) and all fled before his face".[244] Gandalf accurately states that for this reason, they are "a spear of terror in the hand of Sauron, shadow of despair," with the Witch-King as the "Captain of Despair".[245] As such, not only the Nine themselves, but all around them feel the despair of their living death.

Another creature that is living in disrelation to itself due to a Ring of Power is Gollum. Though he did not (fully) become a wraith like the Nazgûl, Gollum was severely tormented by the Ring. In the solitude of his unnaturally long life the Ring tore his self asunder, as illustrated by his split personality. As he used his nickname for the Ring 'my Precious' also for himself, Gollum came to see the Ring as a part of his self. This made him (incorrectly) believe that his self was whole again, and enabled him to mask his own despair. However, when Bilbo 'stole' the Ring, Gollum could no longer evade his despair, which explains why Bilbo was "pursued by [Gollum]'s cries of hate and despair".[246] By losing the Ring, Gollum believed to have lost a part of his self, and he spend the rest of his life finding that which had consumed him. Eventually, on the slopes of Mount Doom, after learning the true goal of Frodo's quest, he lost his self completely to the Ring, as Sam sees in a sudden vision only "a crouching shape, scarcely more than the shadow of a living thing, a creature now wholly ruined and defeated".[247] In the end, the Ring brought Gollum to ultimate despair as he fell to his death in the fires of Doom.

Nevertheless, Tolkien's most dreadful portrayal of inner conflict is that of Ungoliant. As an evil spirit of darkness, Ungoliant always conflictingly "hungered for light and hated it".[248]

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[242] Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness*, 30
[243] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book I, Chapter 11
[244] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Book V, Chapter 4
[245] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Book V, Chapter 4
[246] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *Prologue*, *Of the Finding of the Ring*
[247] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Book VI, Chapter 3
[248] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 64

When she devoured light, she spun it "in dark nets of strangling gloom, until no light more could come to her abode" and because of this paradoxical nature, "she was famished" and in despair.[249] It is said that, in her despair, she "ended long ago, when in her uttermost famine she devoured herself at last".[250] Contrary to Kierkegaard's and Tolkien's Men, the despair of Ungoliant is able to fully consume her self (as her self is thus not eternal).

Moreover, Tolkien not only portrays despair caused by inner conflicts, but also despair caused by not being a self before God. When an Elf dies, its *fëa* is left in an unnatural state because it is in disrelation with its *hröa*. As discussed in section 1.1, this disrelation can only be restored by being rehoused. However, to be rehoused requires the *fëa* to heed the summoning and become a *fëa before Mandos*. Those that are allowed to be rehoused, can walk again in the bliss of Valinor together with kin and the Valar themselves, in harmony with their new *hröa*. Yet, not all will pass Mandos' judgement and they are doomed, just like Fëanor, to remain in their unnatural state in the Halls of Mandos and there wait till the end of Arda. Therefore, there are Elves that do not heed the summoning out of fear for the Valar, but this "refusal had grave consequences".[251] These Elves are indeed spared a potential confinement and their *fëar* are free to wander Middle-Earth, but they will do so in a true Kierkegaardian fashion: for ever in disunity with themselves, that is, in despair.

Similarly, the state of despair of the Dead Men of Dunharrow can be explained as a disrelation with their king. Though the Men of the Mountains swore allegiance to the King of Gondor, when Isildur called upon them, they refused to join the Last Alliance out of fear for Sauron. In their disobedience, they were now in disrelation with their king and as such, Isildur cursed them that they would not have rest until their oath was fulfilled. As the years passed and people passed away, they became wraiths, doomed to a deathless life. Three millennia long the "Sleepless Dead" lead a life of despair, until Aragorn, Isildur's heir, called upon them again.[252] If they now honoured their oath, as their king, Aragorn "will release [them] from this living death!".[253] Only when the relation with the King of Gondor is restored, can they be *before the King*, and finally find peace. Just like in Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death*, only by being a self before the higher power, can the self relinquish the despair of death.

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[249] J.R.R Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 64
[250] J.R.R Tolkien, *Silmarillion,* 71
[251] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring,* 339
[252] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Book VI, Chapter 2
[253] Peter Jackson. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* [Extended Edition], New Line Cinema, 2001, 1:56:25. Though not directly quoted from the book, Peter Jackson's interpretation nevertheless aligns with Tolkien's description of the Army of the Dead and their undead and sleepless state

Estel: the Authentic Acceptance of Death

Just as both Kierkegaard and Heidegger emphasize that only when someone anticipates and accepts the possibility of his death that his life can be truly worthwhile, Tolkien illustrates this with both positive and negative examples. With this, Tolkien shows "that all living beings when facing death are confronted with the direst point of their existence and much depends on the way they tackle the crucial moment that leads them to the terrifying crossroads between death and immortality: one can face this fatal moment either by accepting the reality of death and going through it or by escaping, trying to avoid it, forging ways out and shortcuts which are, however, only illusions".[254] For Tolkien, it thus matters most how people behave in the face of death.

As the shadow over Númenor grew darker, many Númenóreans were enthralled by the prospect of their death and their whole life became a non-authentic being-towards-death. By refusing to live by hope alone and despite (but also because of) all their efforts to prevent death, life became unendurable for the Númenóreans. Symbolically, the kings abandoned the old tradition and instead clung to life until they were old and senile and death took them perforce. The anticipation of their deaths became completely non-authentic, as out of despair they even turned to the dark powers: three of their lords accepted a Ring of Power and became Nazgûl and others followed Ar-Pharazôn in his worship of Melkor. In their ultimate attempt to escape death, they only brought about the death and destruction of Númenor sooner.

Instead, they could have enjoyed the many years of their long lives, if only, like Aragorn and the kings of old, they had accepted death as a natural end. By taking up the throne of Gondor, Aragorn not only restores the line of the Kings of Númenor; what's more, he redeems them. Just like the first king Elros, by "voluntarily renouncing life before falling into dotage, [Aragorn] gives evidence that dying rests within the established order of things. He thus becomes the symbol of the right sense of life and of life's ending: not to cling to material things, but accept with tranquillity and confidence death as a 'natural' passage".[255] In Aragorn's acceptance of his mortality, *he* echoes the kings of old, while Tolkien echoes the Existentialists.

Similarly, the Rings of Power offer an escape from the passing of time, the temptation of which can only be resisted by willingly letting go of it. In Lothlórien, Galadriel used her ring to create a beautiful and timeless realm. Nevertheless, though it sounds admirable, it is against

[254] Andrea Monda, "Memory and Longevity", 159

[255] Simone Bonechi. "In the Mounds of Mundburg." Essay. In *The Broken Scythe: Death and Immortality in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi, 133–54. (Zurich: Walking Tree, 2012), 142

the natural order of time and a clinging to a world that once was. She is only able to accept her fate and let go of her love for the material world after she resists Frodo's offer. Likewise, Bilbo took pride in his old age, though he clearly felt the weariness of it. He loves the Ring and when Gandalf questions him about it, he even mirrored Gollum in calling the Ring his Precious. Nevertheless, Bilbo "gave it up in the end of his own accord: an important point".[256] In giving up that which they love most, Galadriel and Bilbo die to themselves, but through that are allowed to sail west, following the Straight Road to the Undying Lands.

Ultimately, according to both Tolkien and Kierkegaard, the only way to authentically anticipate death is to live by faith and hope. As discussed, because none of the races know anything for certain about what lies beyond their end, they can only trust that Ilúvatar has a purpose with it. As such, they "are bound to a blind act of faith in the positive outcome of life after death, something which requires an enormous and continuous 'existential' endeavour".[257] Yet, it is in this "movement of faith",[258] this "*Estel*",[259] in the face of death, that one is freed from any fear or despair. In one of his letters, Tolkien suggests to "compare the death of Aragorn with a Ringwraith"[260]: one being the embodiment of despair, the other of hope. Fittingly, 'Estel' is the name Tolkien gave to young Aragorn. Even with his dying breath, Aragorn honours his name. As such, Aragorn is able to comfort Arwen that "in sorrow we must go, but not in despair".[261] Feeling the bitterness of mortality, "virtually alone among the Elves [Arwen] finally understands from within the human temptation to despair". [262] Therefore, Arwen's last words to Aragorn can thus be understood as being out of sorrow, but also out of (Kierkegaardian) hope: "Estel, Estel!".[263]

Section 2.4: Tolkien the Existentialist

All in all, Tolkien's philosophy of death and immortality as portrayed in his Legendarium bears a clear resemblance to the Existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger on this topic. First of all, as Tolkien presents mortality as an essential part of human nature from which Men derive the freedom to shape and give meaning to their own existence, it closely resembles Dasein's realisation when one is authentically being-towards-death from

[256] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring,* Book I, Chapter 2
[257] Claudio A Testi. "Logic and Theology in Tolkien's Thanatology.", 63
[258] Simon D. Podmore, *Theophany*, 60
[259] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring*, 320
[260] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no.208
[261] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V
[262] Anna Vaninskaya, *Fantasies*, 172
[263] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King,* Appendix A.I.V

Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Furthermore, Tolkien drew heavily upon Kierkegaard's notion of a living death in the depiction of the various wraiths, with their inner conflict and despair. Moreover, the fear of death (or in case of the Elves, fading) only brings about despair as it goes against the nature of the Children of Ilúvatar and thus brings their self either in disrelation to itself or in disrelation to a higher power. According to both Kierkegaard and Tolkien, only when someone accepts his fate and dies to itself, can he be a self *before God* again. Therefore, the only way to truly live without the fear of death, is to live by faith and have hope (that is, *Estel*) in God's plan with the future beyond this world. "Tolkien's legendarium, therefore, can be taken as an essay on the human condition in terms of (im)mortality, which is closely linked to existentialism and the core question within it, regarding the meaning and purpose of the heart in meeting both joy and sorrow".[264] As such, not only was Tolkien clearly influenced by the ninetieth- and twentieth-century philosophies of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, with regards to the theme of death and immortality, Tolkien can even be regarded as an Existentialist himself.

[264] Jon Mentxakatorre Odriozola. "The Theological Meaning of Tolkien's 'Death as a Gift,'" *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 25, no. 1 (2022): pp. 37-63, https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2022.0002, 43.

CHAPTER 3: TRANSHUMANISM

Another philosophy dealing with the questions of human mortality that arose at the time J.R.R. Tolkien was working on his Legendarium, was the New Biology, or, as it would be known as later, Transhumanism. In this chapter, I will start by looking at the transhumanist vision on death and longevity by examining how J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964) came up with his *New Biology* and how through science mankind can reach the next stage of its evolution. The second section will close off with the critical reception of Transhumanism, most notably that of C.S. Lewis.

Section 3.1: The Rise of the New Biology

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the plethora of scientific discoveries and developments in the century before resulted in concerns over the nature of human progress. At the end of the nineteenth century, the effects of developments like the Industrial Revolution, the advances in scientific medicine and the formalization of multiple new sciences, were evident throughout society. However, "by the end of the century of progress, there was a widespread sense that progress was over"[265] because it seemed that everything there was to discover had now been discovered. This 'century of progress' left scientists and philosophers alike concerned with the idea of progress itself. Because if it were true, this turn of events stood in stark contrast to the newly discovered insights, such as Darwinism, that is of "overpopulation, variation and natural selection – the *survival of the fittest*".[266] As such, the sole reason that humans had evolved as part of the process of natural selection, was that they survived because they outcompeted and outbred less fit types, as "the fitter had triumphed over the weaker through fierce competition—the fiercer the competition, the faster the "progress".[267] Therefore, it was assumed, that if progress would halt after this century, so would the development of human civilization.

As a result, for some people, and most notably for the writer H.G. Wells (1866-1946), the discoveries of the nineteenth century signalled the ultimate end of the human race. For them, "the most glorious fruits of the century of progress – the astronomical, physical, biological, and social laws discovered by nineteenth-century science – suggested that progress itself is

[265] Mark B. Adams. "The Quest for Immortality: Visions and Presentiments in Science and Literature." Essay. In *The Fountain of Youth: Cultural, Scientific, and Ethical Perspectives on a Biomedical Goal*, edited by Stephen G. Post and Robert H. Binstock, 38–71. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40
[266] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 40
[267] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 41

constrained".[268] The realisation that "humans were subject to inexorable natural laws beyond their control and were powerless to shape their individual and collective destiny" caused a "bleak picture of the human future".[269] For science fiction author H.G. Wells, this was the feeding ground for the pessimistic scenarios for the future he addresses in his novels. In his first novel *The Time Machine* (1895), Wells depicts a degenerated future for mankind, as humans deteriorated into two different but equally detestable classes of human species, namely the Eloi and the Morlocks. Later in the novel, millions of years into the future, the time traveller visits an earth in which humanity has died out completely, still long before the sun burns up. If progress was indeed halted, there was nothing that could save mankind from the process it had set in motion and would eventually lead to its own extinction.

Science and the Future

At the turn of the twentieth century, a new, scientific view on human life and society arose to address these concerns about progress, based on the developments of new medical possibilities in the century before. The central aim of this *new biology* was the control of life and the natural processes to improve the quality but also the length of human life. Through the fields of genetics, immunology, experimental embryology and others, the goal was clear and directed at improving the human biology: eugenics. So, as Adams states it, "much of the new biology was ultimately directed at the problems relating to human longevity or, put another way, the scientific quest for human immortality".[270] Though they shared in H.G. Wells' concerns, the *new biologists* were optimistic about the possibilities of changing the natural laws through science, to prevent any human degeneration (let alone, extinction) and release mankind from the grasp of death.

One of the voices the *new biology* was the "controversial and confrontational" J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964) who became known to the public with his essays on human genetics and biochemistry.[271] In 1923, just after exchanging Oxford for Cambridge, he published his paper *Daedalus, or Science and the Future*, selling 15,000 copies in the first year. In the paper, he presented his vision for the control of human life, mainly dealing with ectogenesis, a term coined by Haldane himself – the artificial fertilization (in vitro) of embryo's in a laboratory controlled environment.[272] In the paper *The Last Judgement*, published in 1927, Haldane

[268] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 42
[269] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 41
[270] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 44
[271] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 46
[272] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 46

counters Wells' *The Time Machine* and writes about a future earth in which humans have evolved almost beyond recognition. Millions of years into the future all diseases are completely eliminated, the human pain sense became redundant and evolved away, but most of all, "the healthy human life span is extended to 3000 years"[273], reaching the utopia mankind has always desired. The paper continues to tell the story of how because of the impending destruction of earth, mankind biologically and genetically prepares itself to accommodate life on other planets. Subsequently, different evolutions of man that were specifically bred for the local (often poisonous and inhospitable) atmospheres populate the planets of our whole solar system. It is clear that Haldane believed that by genetically modifying mankind and becoming a better version of itself, mankind could control life, and above all, master death. Therefore, Haldane's work is generally considered as the early vision of Transhumanism, although the term itself did not exist yet as it was coined by Haldane's contemporary, the leading experimental biologist Julian Huxley (1887-1975), decades later. In 1957, he wrote that

> up till now human life has generally been, as Hobbes described it, 'nasty, brutish and short'; the great majority of human beings (if they have not already died young) have been afflicted with misery in one form or another. (…) The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this belief. Perhaps Transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature.[274]

So although Transhumanism officially did not exist yet, the underlying vision for the human future, "one in which the triumphs of the new science were seen as making possible the control of life, long-held dreams of human longevity and new empowerment in determining our ultimate collective fate", [275] was already clearly advocated by Haldane.

The (Post)Human Condition

Though there is no single definition or a universally accepted set of beliefs, transhumanists are united by their desire to upgrade the human species by enhancing its mental and physical abilities, to reach the next stage of human evolution. Having its basis in Darwinism, Transhumanism considers the *Homo sapiens* to be subject to a continuous evolutionary process, a 'work-in-progress' so to say. Considering that "the human body, in its current form, is limited and defective", transhumanists believe that "it is both possible and desirable to make significant

[273] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 47
[274] Julian S. Huxley. "Transhumanism." Essay. In *New Bottles for New Wine: Essays*, 13–17. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 16-17
[275] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 38-39

improvements to the human body", specifically to "our brain power, our strength and, [above] all, our life span".[276] Moreover, "whoever commands greater capacities and remains alive longer in a healthy condition generally leads a more comfortable life than those for whom this is not the case".[277] However, since genetically speaking, the human body has not changed significantly since the Late Pleistocene, "transhumanists do not hold out much hope that natural evolution will produce the necessary improvements at a faster pace".[278] Therefore they believe that mankind should take matters into their own hands and effectuate its own evolution. This is where science comes in. Building upon Haldane's works, transhumanists believe that "technology will imbue us with intellectual, physical and psychological capabilities that far surpass what present-day human beings are familiar with and that this will ultimately transform the human species and human societies in very significant ways".[279]

Through this transformation, human nature will change so fundamentally that it will be unrecognizable. This wish for transformation is, according to Sorgner, the "one key premise of Transhumanism", i.e. "the desirability to become posthuman".[280] As a posthuman, mankind will be released from "bodily constraints that medicine has thus far regarded as inevitable"[281] and therefore from constraints that, throughout history by philosophy and science, have been regarded as fundamentally human. Considering this, "enhancement is in the interest of everyone who strives for power".[282] Whether or not this posthuman is still part of the human species is thus actually part of a larger scholarly debate. Some argue that the posthuman is (just) the further evolutionary step of humanity, whilst others go further and state that they indeed are, but with traits that go above and beyond. It is therefore left to the future to determine how much human this posthuman will still be.

Reaching this final and perfected posthuman was considered a process with many intermediary steps of human transcendence and enhancement. Though technological developments in human biology can make sure human life can be controlled, advanced and prolonged, it will take more than a few developments to reach this next step in the human evolution, let alone its final step. Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950), a like-minded contemporary of

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[276] Gary Elkins. "Transhumanism and the Question of Human Nature." *American Journal of Intelligent Systems* 1, no. 1 (2012), 17
[277] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner. *On Transhumanism*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), 12
[278] Gary Elkins, "Transhumanism and the Question of Human Nature.", 17
[279] Jenny Huberman. "Immortality Transformed: Mind Cloning, Transhumanism and the Quest for Digital Immortality." *Mortality* 23, no. 1 (2018), 50-51
[280] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *On Transhumanism*, 5
[281] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *On Transhumanism*, vii
[282] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *On Transhumanism*, 62

Haldane, depicts in his *Last and First Men: A Story of the Near and Far Future* (1930) the full story of future human development, in which every human species designs and improves the next, until the perfected posthuman is reached.

> The Third Men master the 'plastic art' of controlling and shaping life. (…) they design a successor race, (…) the Fourth Men; realizing their limitations, these in turn (…) produce a new race: their goal was a 'normal human' but 'perfected through and through,' with a life span measured in thousands of years. These become the Fifth Men, who subsequently undergo the events described in Haldane's 'Last Judgment' with remarkable precision. (…) Eventually, various designed and naturally produced species lead to the Eighteenth Men, the final human species, with (…) a life span of a quarter million terrestrial years.[283]

These intermediate stages of Men are what transhumanists call 'transhumans' and are therefore part of the "posthuman's developmental process".[284] Still they are but temporary steps towards the higher goal and are therefore not actively strived for in themselves. Sorgner states that along the path of the enhancement of mankind's "emotional, physical, and intellectual abilities, along with the extension of the health span (…) the transhuman or posthuman can emerge"[285] more or less by accident, as there is no clear definition of when a human becomes a transhuman. For though there is a debate about the humanness of the posthuman, the transhuman certainly belongs to the human species, therefore having similar characteristics to those of normal humans but just exceeding them in some way.

A prerequisite for the possibility that humans can become posthuman, and thus outgrow characteristics that were until then considered fundamentally human, is that there is nothing immutable in human nature. If some aspect of human nature was unalterable, by definition, it would be impossible to outgrow or enhance it. The aspect that in conventional philosophy and religion usually has this property is the human soul. So, since the soul is metaphysical (and arguably eternal), it cannot be tinkered with by timely, material means but this is exactly what the scientific enhancement of Transhumanism would entail. Therefore, "most transhumanists adopt a naturalistic, nondualist, or relational theory of the human, which means that they consider it implausible to view human beings as consisting of an immaterial soul grafted onto a material body".[286] Though they do not completely reduce mankind to a biological process, transhumanists do strip it of its immaterial immortality in order to make it materially immortal.

It is crucial to note however, that it is not the striving for personal immortality that drives transhumanists, but the immortality of humanity as a whole. As Julian Huxley stated when he

[283] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 51
[284] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *On Transhumanism*, 5
[285] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *On Transhumanism*, 11
[286] Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, *On Transhumanism*, 1

coined the term Transhumanism, men should "not just sporadically" transcend and become transhuman, but "in its entirety, as humanity".[287] First of all, the enhancement of a single person would not affect the whole of mankind's future much, and would therefore be outside of the transhuman scope. Only when people could be systematically enhanced in larger quantities, like via Haldane's ectogenesis, would mankind as a whole benefit. Secondly, the current lifetime of a single person would be too short to make significant changes, exemplified by the fact that the timeline of Darwinian evolution spans hundreds of thousands of years, even millions. This is also why the science fictions of Wells, Haldane and Stapledon deal with millions of years, during which period the human race slowly (but steadily) increases its lifespan and eventually reaches practical immortality (that is, such an extended longevity compared to man's current lifespan, that one might as well have been immortal). Because the focus is thus on the future man's immortality, "personal immortality itself is neither the goal nor even a realistic prospect".[288] According to transhumanists, it is therefore not the creation of a single superhuman, nor personal (biological) immortality for themselves that they are after, but the enhancement of the human race for the greater good of mankind.

Section 3.2: Critical Contemporaries

As was to be expected for such controversial ideals, the works of Haldane and his allies sparked fierce responses from contemporary scholars and authors, who saw the dystopian applications of eugenics. One of the first to react was the British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), who published his essay *Icarus or The Future of Science* in 1924 – only a year after Haldane's *Daedalus*. In his essay, Russell expresses his concerns regarding Haldane's ideals and "spelled out some of the dystopian social possibilities in eugenics".[289] He states that even though it might seem that the scientific intervention in human development is for the greater good of mankind, in reality this power will most likely be misused and "that science will be used to promote the power of dominant groups, rather than to make men happy".[290] Several years later, Russell's pessimistic views would be illustrated by Julian Huxley's younger brother, Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) in his novel *Brave New World* (1932). In the novel, Huxley depicts a dystopian future in which society by means of eugenics, selective breeding, conditioning and drugs is

[287] Julian S. Huxley, "Transhumanism.", 17
[288] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 52
[289] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 53
[290] Bertrand Russell. *Icarus; or, the Future of Science*. Project Gutenberg, 2021, 5

fully controlled by the World State. Again a few years later, in 1943 the British writer and apologist C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) would add to this in *The Abolition of Man* that

> the final stage [in Man's conquest of Nature] is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. *Human* nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. We shall (…) be henceforth free to make our species whatever we wish it to be. The battle will indeed be won. But who, precisely, will have won it? For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make other men what they please.[291]

And this would not be the end of it, for the latter would become one of the greatest adversaries of Haldane and his Transhumanism.

For Lewis, his penultimate opposition to the works and ideals of Haldane was his *Space Trilogy*, through the depiction of the main antagonist, the demonically-possessed destroyer-of-worlds Professor Weston. The *Space Trilogy*, consisting of the three science fiction novels *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (1945), tells the story of the philologist Elwin Ransom who is kidnapped by physicist Professor Weston and subsequently, respectively throughout the novels, travels to Mars, Venus and Earth to thwart Weston's plans. Weston has invented space travel with the idea of taking over other planets for human expansion, at the cost of local inhabitants. In his speech to the Oyarsa, the ruler of the planet Mars, Weston declares

> it is in her right, (…) or, if you will, the might of Life herself, that I am prepared without flinching to plant the flag of man on the soil of Malacandra: to march on, step by step, superseding, where necessary, the lower forms of life that we find, claiming planet after planet, system after system, till our posterity—whatever strange forms and yet unguessed mentality they have assumed—dwell in the universe wherever the universe is habitable.[292]

Thanks to the intervention of Ransom, the Oyarsa sees through the plans of Weston and banishes him from the planet. However, years later, in the next novel, Ransom travels to Venus to protect the planet from an attack launched from Earth. On Venus, the biblical fall of man has not happened yet and the people there are still pure and sinless. The attack is headed by Weston, who upon arrival on Venus becomes possessed by the devil. As such, he tries to tempt the innocent queen of Venus into disobedience, mirroring the story of Eve. However, he is unable to succeed as Ransom is eventually able to defeat him.

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[291] C.S. Lewis. *The Abolition of Man.* (Glasgow: Collins, 1978), 30
[292] C.S. Lewis. *Out of the Silent Planet.* Harpercollins Publishers, 2005, Chapter 20

In the characterization of Weston and the theme of the trilogy, Lewis was clearly inspired by Haldane and Stapledon. Lewis stated that for the trilogy, "what immediately spurred [him] to write was Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* [1931] and an essay in J.B.S. Haldane's *Possible Worlds* [1927]".[293] He liked their idea of space travel, but disagreed with their portrayed ideals, or as Lewis put it himself in the preface to *That Hideous Strength*: "Mr. Stapledon is so rich in invention that he can well afford to lend, and I admire his invention (though not his philosophy) so much that I should feel no shame to borrow".[294] As a result, Lewis wrote a similar science fiction novel, but with his own message countering that of Haldane and Stapledon. Lewis intentionally critiques their (as he calls it in his *Funeral of a Great Myth*) 'Popular Evolutionism' or 'Developmentalism'[295], which is "a philosophy that applies Darwinism to the metaphysical sphere, believing that humans may evolve into a new species of gods, spreading from world to world and galaxy to galaxy".[296] In the *Space Trilogy*, the embodiment of this philosophy is clearly Professor Weston, as his speech on Malacandra proves. It is therefore not surprising that Lewis based his satanic character on Haldane and Stapledon, as they had a "desperately immoral outlook which [he tried] to pillory in Weston".[297]

After the publication of Lewis' trilogy, Haldane wrote a defence in which he accused him of being anti-science, sparking a fierce dialog between them. In the year after the publication of *That Hideous Strength*, Haldane wrote *Auld Hornie F.R.S.* (1946), an explicitly critical review of Lewis' works, stating that "Mr. Lewis's idea is clear enough. The application of science to human affairs can only lead to hell. This world is largely run by the devil".[298] Lewis refuted this reaction in his *A Reply to Professor Haldane* (1946) where he writes that "if you must reduce the romance to a proposition, the proposition would be almost the converse of that which the Professor supposes: not 'scientific planning will certainly lead to Hell,' but 'Under modern conditions any effective invitation to Hell will certainly appear in the guise of

[293] C.S. Lewis. *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*. Edited by Walter Hooper. (New York, NY: Harper-Collins, 2004), vol. 2, 236-237
[294] C.S. Lewis. *That Hideous Strength: A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups.* (New York, NY: Scribner Classics, 1996), 7-8
[295] C.S. Lewis. "The Funeral of a Great Myth." Essay. In *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper, 82–93. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), 82-83
[296] Mark R. Hall. "Reframing Time and Space: Narrative as a Vehicle of Travel, Tragedy and Transcedence in H.G. Wells's The Time Machine and C.S. Lewis's Perelandra." Essay. In *C.S. Lewis and the Inklings: Discovering Hidden Truth*, edited by Salwa Khoddam, Mark R. Hall, and Jason Fisher, 236–47. (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.), 239
[297] C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters,* 236-237
[298] J.B.S. Haldane. "Auld Hornie, F. R. S." Essay. In *Everything Has a History*, 249–58. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1951), 251

scientific planning'—as Hitler's regime in fact did".[299] Lewis made it clear that he did not oppose science in itself, but "all scientific attempts to manipulate or control life or nature for human purposes as contrary to the divine harmonious order and a source of great evil".[300] Nevertheless, the debate continued as both men continued to write criticizing articles about each other, some of which were only published posthumously, amongst others *A Reply to Professor Haldane* (officially published in 1966, originally known as *Anti-Haldane*) for Lewis and *More Anti-Lewisite* (1951) for Haldane.

Interestingly, Lewis was also inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien in the writing of his *Space Trilogy*. Though it is no surprise that Lewis and Tolkien influenced each other in writing (since they were good friends and both members of the informal discussion society The Inklings), this instance was specifically referenced by Tolkien multiple times in his letters. What started out as a disappointment with the genre, became a wager between the two to make an attempt at writing science fiction themselves. Christopher Tolkien recounted about his father that "he recorded that 'one day' C.S. Lewis said to him that since 'there is too little of what we really like in stories' they would have to try to write some themselves. He went on: We agreed that he should try 'space-travel', and I should try 'time-travel'. As such, Lewis wrote his trilogy about space-travel, while Tolkien started on his time-travel story *The Lost Road* (1936) but never finished it. It is therefore very fitting that Lewis alludes to Tolkien in the characterization of his protagonist, the philologist Elwin Ransom. Though his profession might the most obvious link, also his names contain a reference. His first name 'Elwin' actually means "Elf-friend"[301] and regarding his last name, "in discussing his name, Ransom provides an etymology: the name is not technically related to the modern word 'ransom' he says, but rather is a contraction of the Old English 'Ranolf's Son'".[302] As an Elf-loving professor of Old English, Tolkien would have clearly recognised himself in Elwin Ransom. Evidently, Lewis acknowledged Tolkien's influence on these specific novels so much that he even used him as protagonist in his defence against Haldane.

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[299] C.S. Lewis. *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*. (New York, NY: HarperOne, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2017), 114
[300] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 58
[301] Diana P. Glyer. "Lewis in Disguise: Portraits of Jack in the Fiction of His Friends ." Essay. In *C.S. Lewis and the Inklings: Discovering Hidden Truth*, edited by Salwa Khoddam, Mark R. Hall, and Jason Fisher, 34–54. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, 49
[302] Diana P. Glyer, "Lewis in Disguise", 49

Section 3.3: Tolkien's Reply to Professor Haldane

It is almost certain that Tolkien knew about Haldane's work on Transhumanism through his friend C.S. Lewis, but also through his own reading and academic circle. From Lewis' own writing it becomes clear that he was very passionate about the works of Haldane on Transhumanism, a philosophy which he strongly opposed. Therefore, one can safely assume that Lewis shared his thoughts and defences against Transhumanism with his fellow Inklings, who, according to their habit, discussed and debated such topics. Moreover, since Lewis wrote his *Space Trilogy*, his primary reaction to Haldane, as a bet with Tolkien, the latter was specifically involved. In *The Notion Club Papers* (1945), Tolkien writes about a 'fictive' literary group, and amongst others recounts their discussion of Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*, proving that he read it.[303] In addition to Lewis' criticism, Tolkien was familiar with Haldane and his works, as Tolkien has read Haldane's book *My Friend Mr. Leakey* (1937).[304] Furthermore, towards the publication of his works, Tolkien regularly corresponded with the novelist Naomi Mitchison née Haldane, sister of J.B.S. Haldane.[305] Though she started out as geneticist together with her brother, when she turned to writing, she eventually became a proof reader for Tolkien's works. As such, they discussed many different topics within the Legendarium. Though Tolkien, in his fashion, never publicly stated whether or not he was familiar with Transhumanism, one can presume his was quite familiar with the movement and its ideals.

Though Tolkien was not as explicit in his denouncement of Transhumanism and his critique on Haldane as Lewis was, in his Legendarium he nevertheless clearly opposes all ideals Transhumanism stands for. Where Lewis openly opposed Haldane, calling him by name in his essays and letters, Tolkien was more subtle. Just as he disliked Lewis' love for allegory, Tolkien also disliked how unobscured Lewis put 'messages' into his work. However, this dislike was only aimed at the style, not the message itself, for as good friends Tolkien "shared much of his worldview".[306] Both Lewis and Tolkien were devout Christians and as such, Tolkien understood the dangers of Transhumanism as "a scientistic religion, stated as myth and holding forth the prospect of collective human immortality" that "posed a real challenge to traditional religion, with its emphasis on individual spiritual immortality".[307] Though more subtle, Tolkien nevertheless interwove his criticism of Transhumanism into the world he created. Just like

[303] J.R.R. Tolkien, and Christopher Tolkien. *Sauron Defeated*. (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 164
[304] Holly Ordway, *Modern Reading*, 62
[305] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no. 122, 144, 154, 155, 164, 176 and 220
[306] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 58
[307] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 60

Lewis' *Space Trilogy* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, Tolkien presents his reaction through narrative.

Undesirable Progress

Tolkien does not necessarily doubt the power of science to conquer man's nature, he rather questions the desirability of it. While Transhumanists regard death as something to be conquered, Tolkien defends that "certainly Death is not an Enemy!".[308] As it was a gift from Ilúvatar himself to Men, it should be accepted as such. "While acknowledging the desire to escape mortality, [Tolkien] felt that this urge was impossible and, in fact, forbidden".[309] Since "it was not permitted to the Valar to withhold Death from [Men]",[310] the same, Tolkien argues, holds for Men. Therefore, "to attempt by device or 'magic' to recover longevity is thus a supreme folly and wickedness of 'mortals'".[311] As such, all attempts in the Legendarium to escape death and to prolong life are in vain: all the research and embalming of the Númenóreans only brought death to them sooner and in Gondor the line of kings completely died out because of their concern over death. Some attempts did seems to work however, but with dire consequences. The prime example of this, are the Rings of Power.

For Tolkien, the Rings of Power are the representation of the dangers of science and technology. In his description of the Rings, Tolkien mirrors Lewis' statement in *A Reply to Professor Haldane* about the danger of science: "The Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others — speedily and according to the benefactor's own plans — is a recurrent motive".[312] Sauron, Tolkien's 'Lord of magic and machines', offered the Elves of Eregion the power to prevent fading, presenting himself as the benevolent Lord of Gifts. Consequently, as discussed in section 1.3, the forging of the Rings brought the Elves the closest to falling and to 'machinery'. In their desire for escape, they quite literally forged their own doom. As such, as Haldane presents immortality for the greater good of mankind, Tolkien tries to expose him as a Lord of machines, for "longevity" has always been "the chief bait of Sauron" as well.[313] Therefore, in his portrayal of the Rings of Power, Tolkien warns his readers for "the

[308] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 208
[309] D. B. Hogan, and A. M. Clarfield. "Venerable or Vulnerable: Ageing and Old Age in JRR Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings." Medical Humanities 33, no. 1 (2007), 5
[310] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Silmarillion.,* 177
[311] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 212
[312] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 131
[313] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no. 212

dark abyss to which their progress tends":[314] blindly following "leads the small to a Gollum, and the great to a Ringwraith".[315] And in the dark abyss in Middle-Earth, the Nazgûl indeed fell the deepest.

Though the Ringwraiths conquered their human nature through the Rings, their existence became less than human and completely undesirable. When Sauron offered them an mechanical escape of their mortality, the Nazgûl all accepted it. Moreover, the Rings granted them enhanced senses and abilities, as they had heightened smell, could see the invisible world and even could become invisible themselves. With these above-human abilities, Tolkien mockingly mirrors Haldane's description of transhumans. As Tolkien subsequently has his transhumans fall into shadow and despair, he thus shows that even though the science of Transhumanism can "grant an artificial life-extension," it ultimately turns "those who were men before into undead, servants of the master that generated them".[316] Though becoming a transhuman is presented as something desirable, with his depiction of the Ringwraiths, Tolkien turns it into the most undesirable prospect of science.

Moreover, under the same influence Gollum also becomes a transhuman, but is more comparable to H.G. Wells' Morlocks from *The Time Machine* than to Haldane's ideal from *The Last Judgement*. Like the Nazgûl, Gollum not only reached an extraordinary age, also his senses and abilities were enhanced by the 'magic' of the Ring. Yet, the Ring affects him in a different way: as Gollum goes beyond his humanity in his unnatural long life, he does not fade into a wraith, but turns into a nocturnal, feral creature. In his transhuman state Gollum becomes like a 'maggot' and a 'prowling thing of insect-kind', only traveling by night. With this imagery, Tolkien seemingly turns Gollum into one of H.G. Wells' Morlocks.[317] In Wells' far future, the ordinary working-class had evolved (or degenerated) into the nocturnal, "ant-like" and "subterranean" Morlocks.[318] Moreover, just like "dark Morlocks tending their machines" and factories deep underground, Gollum tended to the Ring (i.e. his 'machine') in the dark of his cave.[319] Though they were both once human, they evolved into "inhuman sons of men".[320] However, as discussed in section 3.1, Haldane specifically opposed this pessimistic vision of

[314] J.R.R. Tolkien. "Mythopoeia." Essay. In *Tree and Leaf: Including the Poem Mythopoeia*, 83–90. (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 89
[315] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no. 212
[316] Alberto Ladavas, *Sub-Creator*, 128
[317] William N. Rogers, and Michael R. Underwood. "Gagool and Gollum: Exemplars of Degeneration in King Solomon's Mines and The Hobbit." Essay. In J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views on Middle-Earth, edited by George Clark and Daniel Timmons, 121–32. (Westport (Conn.): Greenwood Press, 2000), 126-127
[318] H. G. Wells. *The Time Machine*. New York: H. Holt and Co., 1923, Chapter 7
[319] J.R.R. Tolkien. "On Fairy-Stories." Essay. In *The Monsters and the Critics: And Other Essays*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, 109–61. (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 137
[320] H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, Chapter 7

the future in his own science fiction. By (implicitly) comparing Gollum to the Morlocks, Tolkien uses "the Morlockian horror of factories" to emphasize the undesirability of Transhumanism for the common people.[321]

Dystopian Immortality

According to Tolkien, the greatest folly of man is to confuse longevity with immortality, as the latter is impossible within Time. In the *Athrabeth,* Finrod reminds Andreth that though Elves are in a sense deathless, they are only 'immortal within Arda'. Since their life-span is thus "linked to the duration of this world, the problem is simply shelved. In modern terms, Finrod's arguments can be summarized thus: 'what's a life span of a few billion years in the face of eternity?'".[322] Even if Transhumanists succeed and mankind's life-span is increased to thousands or even millions of years, at some point death would still come. Therefore, Tolkien argues that such a longevity is just "counterfeit 'immortality'" as "true immortality is beyond Ëa".[323] As long as Men resides within Time, it is impossible to be endless, and thus deathless. The ideals of Transhumanism are therefore just illusions and "the work of the Enemy, and one of the chief causes of human disaster".[324] In Tolkien's view, true immortality can only exist outside of Time, with God, and all attempts to replicate it within Time are a folly.

Despite his criticism, Tolkien doesn't necessarily rejects an extended longevity in and by itself, but rather the way it is achieved. This distinction becomes most clear in the contrast between Gollum and Elros, as though both of them live for up to 500 years, Tolkien presents Elros' age as a blessing and Gollum's as unnatural. For Tolkien, the difference lies within their nature. As a Half-Elf, Elros was given the choice of his fate by Ilúvatar. When he chose mortality, he was subsequently blessed with a long life. Gollum, however, did not receive his longevity, but grasped it himself. When Déagol found the One Ring, Gollum was immediately drawn to its power, and murdered his friend without any hesitation to obtain an artificially lengthened life-span. With this contrast between Elros and Gollum, Tolkien poses a question, as a prelude to what is still to come in the story of Númenor: if so much evil can come from people who received their longevity from God, how much evil will there then come from people (like Haldane) who want to obtain it by themselves?

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[321] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories.", 150
[322] Christopher Garbowski, *Eucatastrophe,* 30
[323] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no.212
[324] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters,* no.208

Just like Russell and Lewis, Tolkien shows through the story of the Downfall of Númenor that power makes a tyrant out of man. Compared to Tolkien's previous loathsome examples of transhumans, the Númenóreans are much more in line with the Transhumanist ideals. As Tolkien's Men reach their zenith at Númenor, they can be safely regarded as the posthumans of Middle-Earth. At the height of their bliss, sail to Middle-Earth and there help and teach the lesser people. However, as their desire for immortality grew (i.e. the desire to go even beyond their posthuman state), their power increased and their attitude towards the people of Middle-Earth changed as well. In their dealings with the lesser men, the Númenóreans became conquerors and tyrants, enslaving and sacrificing them in their dark worship of Melkor. For Tolkien, whether it concerns Númenóreans or Transhumanists, "'power' is an ominous and sinister word in all these tales".[325] Therefore, though his Legendarium, Tolkien warns his readers that the Transhumanist enhancement of the human condition will not be at the benefit, but rather at the expense of mankind itself.

Section 3.4: Haldane's Ring

All in all, without ever explicitly stating it, Tolkien was in fact a critical contemporary of Haldane, just like Lewis. In his portrayal of death and immortality, Tolkien clearly opposes Transhumanism through narrative. In story of the Rings of Power, Tolkien shows the dangers of turning to machinery and science to overcome death: enhancement at the cost of one's humanity. Furthermore, Tolkien seconds Russell's, Lewis' and Huxley's fear for the dystopian prospects of these scientific enhancements and the misuse of power that will undoubtedly follow the accession to trans- and posthumans. But above all, Tolkien criticized the Transhumanist view of death as an Enemy-to-be-conquered and their subsequent folly of trying to escape it through counterfeit immortality.

Just as Sauron had his Rings of Power to bring all people of Middle-Earth under his dominion, Haldane had his own Ring of Power to control all life on earth, a Ring of Science and Machinery. Between the *Space Trilogy* and *The Lord of the Rings*, "in a way, it is (…) both Lewis and Tolkien, (…) mythologically lamenting what science and technology have done to the world and the far greater harm they threaten to do if Haldane and his ilk have their way".[326] Thus, to fully understand Tolkien representation of death and immortality in his Legendarium, one must at least be familiar with the twentieth-century philosophy of Transhumanism and the scientific ideals of J.B.S. Haldane.

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[325] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters*, no. 131
[326] Mark B. Adams, "The Quest for Immortality", 59

CONCLUSION

As shown, Tolkien was aware of modern literature and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophies of Existentialism and Transhumanism, through friends such as C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams and the discussion group The Inklings. As discussed in chapter 2, Tolkien shared much of his philosophy on death and immortality with Kierkegaard and Heidegger. By using the same analogies, Tolkien also shows a clear connection between his own Legendarium and the works of these Existential thinkers. Furthermore, as shown in chapter 3, Tolkien clearly opposes Transhumanism in his Legendarium by incorporating many metaphors and story lines that demonstrate the dangers of using machinery (i.e. Science and technology) to enhance the human condition and life-span. As such, Tolkien's works can be regarded as dystopic warning against Transhumanism.

Evidently, Tolkien was thus influenced by modern philosophy, interweaving his reaction to and opinion of these modern thoughts into his Middle-Earth. Although Tolkien never explicitly outed his opinion on modern philosophy, he implicitly endorsed Existentialism and opposed Transhumanism throughout his Legendarium.

I have shown thus that "the popular idea of Tolkien as the arch-medievalist, uninterested in modern literature"[327] is incorrect and does not do justice to the intellectual and academic side of Tolkien. Although Tolkien was first and foremost a medievalist and his love for philology and medieval literature can be found at the heart of his Legendarium, his interests were broader and so was his knowledge. The modern works of Existentialism and Transhumanism have had a significant influence on Tolkien in writing his Legendarium. Therefore, to fully comprehend and appreciate Tolkien's work an understanding of modern literature and philosophy is thus a distinct prerequisite.

[327] Holly Ordway, *Modern Reading*, 14

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