The Meaning of Death for Life: Or towards a Proper Sense of Belonging
Vrijer, Pascal de

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The Meaning of Death for Life

Or towards a Proper Sense of Belonging

Master's Thesis
Pascal de Vrijer
S1487914
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Introduction

Death. Death is the ending of life as we know it.

How often do you think about death? Your own death or the death of the other? How often do you think about how death affects your life? What meaning do you ascribe to death? It appears that most people do not reflect on the importance of death on a daily basis. Yet, death is such an important phenomenon in life. Death is the ending of life as we know it. Even when the other dies our life has been changed. Just the thought of our own demise can fill us with fear. We may fear to lose our life and everything that made our life great or we might fear death, because it is often unknown to us when we will die. Although death, at this moment, is an inevitability, we are getting closer to eventually finding a way to overcome death. Our contemporary ‘Scientific paradigm’, the dominant worldview defined by a ‘will to control’, may eventually lead us to gain control over death. As I will argue the will to control death in particular stems from a negative view towards death. Having a negative view towards death means a devaluation of death. This view does not acknowledge the importance of death for life and as a consequence, this leads to a devaluation of life, because this devaluation of death does not lead us to a proper sense of belonging in the world. A sense of belonging created by lasting meaning.

The aim of my thesis is to evaluate the meaning of death for life in order to understand how we should view death today. I discuss the main paradigms in terms of which death has been understood in Western society. The main focus of this thesis will be the currently dominant ‘scientific’ view of death, which, so I will argue, ultimately leads us to nihilism. To counteract this nihilist tendency I argue for alternative Existentialist views that acknowledge the importance of death for life, and allow for a way of life that affirms life. I then argue that the death of the other and our relation to the other are of major importance in order to live a meaningful life.

In chapter one I use Adam Buben's framework for distinguishing a number of different paradigms for understanding death in terms of their answers to the following three questions:

1. Is there life after death?
2. Should we think about death in daily life, and be aware of our impending demise?
3. Should we fear death?

To these I will add a fourth question:

4. Is death considered a necessary condition for a meaningful life?

The aim of chapter one is to indicate how the Scientific paradigm came about through a genealogical investigation of historical views of death, which at the same time allows me to explain the difference between Ancient views of death, that view death as a necessary
condition for a meaningful life on the one hand, and on the other hand the Scientific view of death as something negative.

In chapter two I give a critique of the Scientific paradigm’s negative view of death. I will start by giving a Nietzschean critique, which explains why the Scientific paradigm leads to nihilism.

To explain why the Scientific paradigm considers death to be a bad thing, I discuss Nagel's deprivation theory: death is bad because it takes away the possibility of future good. I contrast this view with Bernard Williams’ boredom arguments to the effect that it is rather the absence of death that is a bad thing. Williams draws attention to the fact that immortality would compromise specific conditions that need to be met for life to be meaningful.

To gain a deeper understanding of what makes life meaningful I introduce Nussbaum's and Scheffler's risk arguments, which give a closer look at the idea that the absence of death may be worse than death itself. These arguments aim to show what we would lose with the absence of death.

These risk arguments have been contested by Niko Kolodny, who argues that although we would lose certain risks, other risks would be heightened. By arguing that these heightened risks must be understood as fates worse than death I return to the point of the discussion's departure to conclude that the absence of death is worse than death itself.

The aim of chapter three is to give a radical alternative to the Scientific paradigm’s view of death. I begin by introducing Kierkegaard’s Christian Existentialist view that helps us to gain a better, deeper understanding of the risk arguments, through the notion of the leap of faith. What Kierkegaard teaches us is an unconditional surrender to life and a commitment to life-affirmation, which he offers as the remedy to nihilism. Kierkegaard emphasizes that to risk life is to live life, which is in line with Nussbaum and Scheffler's risk arguments.

I introduce Heidegger's Dasein as an Existentialist ontology which gives a secular view of death. Dasein helps deepen our understanding of the temporal dynamic of human life, through its care structure that holds death as a necessary condition for life. We are defined by our being-towards-death, which means that life implies death.

A shortcoming of these Existentialist views of death is arguably their focus on the individual's relation to one's own death. In point of fact, our experience of death during our own lifetime mostly concerns the death of others. In chapter four I discuss our relation to the other and the death of the other. Combining the Existentialist view of death with Nussbaum's and Scheffler's risk arguments, I explain how the notions of openness, vulnerability and acceptance are helpful elements in making life meaningful through our connection to the other. The dynamics of life consist in an interaction of life and
death, ourself and the other, and the ever looming possibility of gain and loss. It is in our relation to the other that the importance of death for life shows itself most clearly.
1. The history of the philosophy of Death

1.1 Introducing the historical paradigms

The aim of this chapter is to indicate how the Scientific paradigm came about through a genealogical investigation of historical views of death, which at the same time allows me to convey the difference between the Ancient views of death, that view death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life and the Scientific negative view of death.

We are able to trace the basis of our most ‘fundamental’ thoughts and beliefs about death back to ancient Greece, therefore I start by introducing the foundationally dominant Platonic and Epicurean paradigms (Buben 2016, 4). I have distinguished these paradigms and the paradigms that spring from them on the basis of Buben's framework (Buben 2016, 10).

Buben distinguished the paradigms on the basis of three questions:

The first question concerns how these paradigms look at the postmortem continuation of particular subjective experience: is there life after death and to which capacity? They believe in a spiritual immortality, which means there is an eternal spirit or consciousness.

The second question concerns how these paradigms look at the importance of death in daily life: should we reflect on death and acknowledge our impending demise at any moment during our daily life?

The third question concerns how these paradigms look at the fear of death: Should we fear death? Should we alleviate the fear of death?

To these three questions I will add a fourth ‘concluding’ question: does this paradigm view death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life? The distinction between ‘death being necessary for a meaningful life’ and ‘death as completely negative’ is that even if it is the case that death is taken as bad or an evil, the absence of death is considered as worse than death itself. The first three questions show us the different ways in which the paradigms come to their conclusion for the fourth question. The fourth question provides us with an answer concerning how the paradigms view the meaning of death for life. A completely negative view of death does not view death as something that provides meaning in life.

1.2 The Platonic paradigm

The Platonic paradigm views death as something good and as a necessary condition for a meaningful life.
The story of Socrates' death by hemlock is a prime example of Platonic reflection on death, therefore I will begin by asking the question: how did Socrates so easily accept his fate of being sentenced to death and why was Socrates not afraid to die?

To answer this question we can look at the logic of Socrates himself. A well-known fact about Socrates is that he understood that in essence he knew nothing. This means that if Socrates understands that he knows nothing, he also does not know what happens after he dies. Therefore, to Socrates it is like asking ‘what if’ questions: you do not know what will happen and thus you change your behaviour out of insecurity, because of what might happen. To Socrates living this way is not living wisely, because what we fear, might be a blessing in disguise.

So, what Socrates argues is that we should not worry about the insecurity of future happenings such as death or fear of death, because we do not know what happens when we die (Plato 2002, Apology 29b). Another aspect Socrates explicates is that we have no ‘being’, no perception or feeling after our demise. We transform into the ‘platonically ideal’, which means that our essential ‘spiritual’ being moves on to another place (Plato 2002, Apology 40c). He imagines us either succumbing to a pleasant dreamless slumber or we live a prolonged (after)life where we will be able to enjoy the presence of our ancestors and the heroes of old (Plato 2002, Apology 41a). Socratic wisdom thus dictates that Socrates views death as good, because we either succumb pleasantly to a place without pain and suffering or enjoy a pleasant afterlife.

The Phaedo offers a different view on what happens when we die influenced by the Pythagorean transmigration of souls (Buben 2016, 10). According to the Phaedo, the human is a combination of a mortal body and an eternal soul. This means that before birth and after death an essential part of ‘the self’ remains. The soul without the body is in a pure ‘ideal’ state close to godly ‘divine being’ (Plato 2002, Phaedo 75b-77a). Our souls get reborn after death, because ‘living’ souls can only come from ‘dead’ souls, this would mean that there is a cycle of rebirth, because the people that are born carry the souls of the deceased. This is also why Socrates says that only what is bodily can be destroyed, because the body is attached to the worldly realm and not the divine spiritual realm (Buben 2016, 11). So, if you believe there is a cycle of rebirth it would mean you have no reason to view death as negative or bad, because death would merely mean another rebirth. Therefore, the Platonic paradigm views death as good.

In ‘the Republic’ Plato offers the allegory of the cave, which serves as an example of the importance of death in Platonic thought. In the allegory of the cave one is shackled to the cave wall and can only see the shadows on the wall before you (Plato 2008). You don't know that these shadows are in essence an optical illusion and thus you accept the reality of your world, while being ignorant of the real world. If you were able to climb out of the cave you would find the real world. The world of ideas and pure knowledge. Plato emphasizes the need to think for oneself and face reality. Philosophy's aim for Plato is attaining truth and pure knowledge and it seems that in order to attain that status we need to imitate the experience of being dead while alive. To come as close as possible to divine truth in life. Which means that the Platonic paradigm takes life as a practice run for death, because “the highest form of life approximates, as closely as possible, being dead, which is really a
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prolonged and perfected form of existence (Buben 2016, 11). The highest form of life can be understood as ‘the most meaningful form of life’. This means that death, in Platonic thought, is that which guides us towards the ideal. Plato thus emphasizes the cultivation of the ideal self as something in relation to death. In this way the Platonic paradigm views death as good and as a necessary condition for a meaningful life.

1.3 The Epicurean paradigm

With the Epicurean paradigm we have a view of death that tries to eliminate the fear of death. To the Epicureans death is simply an event we do not experience when we are dead. There is no postmortem experience, so to the Epicureans the thought of death should not matter for life. This might seem reasonable if you believe that ‘when we exist, death is not, and when death is, we are not’. From this statement two conclusions follow (Scheffler 2013, 84-85);

1. Death is not bad for the person who dies, or, alternatively, that it is not a misfortune or an evil for that person.

2. One has no reason to fear one's own death.

These Epicurean conclusions spring from the atomistic belief behind Epicureanism. Epicureans believe that we are made of a sort of ‘atoms’, different particles and pieces that form something, stick together, and in death certainly let loose and disperse (Epicurus 1994, Letter to Herodotus 40-44). With this dispersal any subjective experience that was, now no longer remains and thus no subject experiences pain when dead. So, death becomes a release of every experience we were able to have in life. Death is the end of all experiences, including suffering. Thus, the Epicureans argue: if there is a hell, it is a hell on earth and similarly, if there is a heaven, it is a heaven on earth. Therefore, they believe, death is nothing to be afraid of, but we should rather fear creating a hell on earth. This Epicurean argument is meant to show us that life in the ‘present’ is more valuable to our subjective experience than being concerned with death in daily life. Consequently, the Epicurean Paradigm does not view death as something negative and death itself should not be feared.

Both the Epicureans and the Platonists alleviate the fear of death in a way where death is not something to be taken as negative. However, the way in which they both deal with death is completely different. The Platonists focus on cultivating the self when alive in order to obtain an ideal version of yourself, which approximates the state of death (which is transcendence to the realm of the ideal). The Epicureans, however, focus on the cultivation of the self in order to create as much happiness and as little pain as possible in present life, because when you are dead you will no longer feel at all.

We see this contrast in Epicurus’ aim to undo the Platonic damage that is caused by a longing for immortality by comforting people with the thought that death is nothing to be feared (Epicurus 1994, Letter to Menoeceus 124). The problem here for Epicurus lies in the longing for immortality. He disagrees with the way in which the Platonists arrive at the
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1.4 Stoicism as a bridge between Platonism and Christianity

To Josiah Gould there is a clear connection between the Stoic Roman empire (think of the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius for example) and the ashes of the late Roman empire that kindled the flame of Christianity (Gould 1970, 13). As Gould claims “it is in the third century a.d., when Stoicism itself begins to lose ground and to be absorbed piecemeal into Neoplatonic and Christian thought. Consider, for example, the rather Stoic idea of ‘memento mori’, ‘know thou will die’ (and the related perseverance in the face of physical suffering and martyrdom) that has been an important aspect of Christian thought (and artwork) throughout Christian history (Gould 1970, 13; Buben 2016, 26).”

Although there is a clear inheritance found within the notion of memento mori, the conclusion that the Stoics take away from memento mori are different. For Stoics memento mori is about a daily reflection upon death in order to let go of the fear of death. In a Platonic sense daily reflection upon death holds major importance in Stoicism. The aim for this reflection differs, because it’s aim is to alleviate fear of death and in the case of the Stoics this alleviation should arrive at a point where suicide, the killing of oneself, becomes a logical possibility (Buben 2016, 27). This would mean we have gained a semblance of control over death, because we decide the moment of suicidal death.

Like the Epicureans, the Stoics were not focused on a possible afterlife or on using memento mori in order to improve a possible afterlife, like the Christians do. The Stoics were focused on a certain detachment from life. They had an ‘alas, I cannot change the weather’ type of attitude towards the world. Which means that you let go of that which is beyond your control. This attitude acknowledges limitation and leads to an acceptance of death which in turn alleviates the fear of death, because we have only a limited amount of control over our death and the death of the other. As the Stoics say: “Death is a perfectly natural, nonharmful part of existing that must not be fought against if tranquility is to be attained. Death is simply the reintegration of an individual spark into the divine fire that makes up the universe (Buben 2016, 26).” Death for the Stoics meant a return to the source, which for them was the divine fire. To the Stoics, the cultivation of the best state of being and therefore the most meaningful state of being, tranquility, was attained by letting go of
controlling the death of the other. Instead we should stay in our own field of control. Control over yourself and your own emotions, control over your own fears.

All in all, the Stoic paradigm views death as good, because you have control over death in a suicidal manner. Furthermore, death is a necessary condition for a meaningful life, because tranquility is attained by alleviating the fear of death through the belief that death is a return to the source.

1.5 The Christian(-Platonic) paradigm

The Christian paradigm introduces a fundamentally theological and philosophical way of living that views death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life.

In order to understand the Christian paradigm we start off with the prime example of Jesus Christ's life and death as how one should live and die in Christian terms. Christ was a martyr, he died for our sins and in this way, being a martyr in the eyes of God is the most Christian thing you can and should do. In the Platonic sense one should want to approximate death. In the Christian sense this does not differ, only the way in which you approximate death differs. Instead of approximating death through philosophical reasoning it is now approximated by faith. The difference between philosophical reasoning and faith being that in philosophical reasoning one has to use logic to determine the truth, but with Christian faith logic is not a prerequisite for determining truth. Once one becomes a Christian and thus has faith in Christ one is reborn (Buben 2016, 11-12).

The approximation to death is clearly not physical. It is comparable to an ego-death. Who you were died when you chose the Christian life of faith and with it you detach yourself from worldly living in order to prepare for the afterlife when you finally physically pass away. This worldly detachment is the approximation to death in life. This detachment of everything that is not divine, everything of the earth and world is visible in, for example, Saint Augustine(Augustine 1993, 14). Christianity, like Platonism, thus is all about the perfect soul being released from its earthly shackles and therefore constitutes, to the Christian, real freedom (Augustine 2006, 7.13-27). Christian faith is about letting go of reason and humbling oneself in the eyes of God.

Augustine offers an example for why you should live the Christian martyr life. Augustine believes that with the fall from Eden humans are unable to save themselves (Augustine 1998, 13.1-5, 10-12). This means that for Christians the reality is such that they are a slowly decaying corrupted body attached to the world and unless they are able to approximate living death in life they might not be granted the eternal blessing as reward for carrying the burden of earthly life and suffering. For a true Christian death is salvation (Buben 2016, 18). Therefore, death is a necessary condition for gaining this salvation.

Blaise Pascal offers us a somewhat more nuanced understanding of death and Christian faith. To Blaise death was a deadline. You either believe in Christ and the immortal soul or risk the consequence of failing to have a ticket into God's realm. Do you choose to eternally
be happy or unhappy (Pascal 2005, 221)? In this way Blaise is trying to urge everyone individually to memento mori, you never know when your time runs out to get your affairs in order and make amends. Everyone thus needs to die to the world. This dying to the world is denying life, hatred of the world, of the body and ultimately hatred of oneself, because you are selfish, you are self-confident, you are self-reliant and you need to undergo an ego-death in order to become truly faithful, like Christ, in the eyes of God. You sacrifice yourself to become reborn as something more. Precisely because self-sacrifice is not reasonable, faith is “God felt by the heart, not by reason (Pascal 2005, 81).” Faith is not reasonable, therefore a leap of faith goes beyond all reason. So, if God is good and he created life and death, both life and death have an element of goodness. A meaningful life to a Christian is a life where you live with memento mori in mind, this means that death is a necessary condition for a meaningful life, because life is lived in order to gain access to God and heaven in your afterlife.

1.6 The Scientific paradigm

In order to define the Scientific paradigm I will first continue with the genealogical investigation by introducing Friedrich Nietzsche. He explains that within the Platonic-Christian ascetic ideal is a ‘will to truth’ (Nietzsche 2017, 115). The ascetic ideal is a willing of nothingness which is considered as better than willing nothing at all, a definition of nihilism (Nietzsche 2017, 123). When we look at the relation between Platonism and Christianity we see that Christianity shares and lends ideas from Platonism as a certain ‘progression’ of ideas. The Socratic love of wisdom survived the transition and with it reason took root and finally culminated in the disbelief of ‘the biggest lie’. The lie that God exists. Nietzsche argues, that we created God and with the realization that God was our creation, a fragment of humanity, chose to ‘kill’ God (Nietzsche 2006, 5, 69 ; 2017, xiii). The death of god in Nietzsche is a metaphor for the world becoming evidently more interested with scientific data of the real. With this increase in interest in scientific data of the real humanity became arguably more secular. The loss of Godly meaning following the ‘death of God’ has led to the dominant position of the Scientific paradigm today, because it took God’s position as that which defines the truth.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer provide further genealogical evidence (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002). In ‘the dialectic of enlightenment’ Adorno and Horkheimer argue that ‘enlightenment’ thinking was already visible within Homeric and Platonic thought. The Scientific paradigm is characterized by this enlightenment thinking, because it uses reason to dispel untruths and control the world around us through logical reasoning, albeit in a different manner from the Platonic paradigm. Adorno and Horkheimer explain that: “The awakening of the subject is bought with the recognition of power as the principle of all relationships. In face of the unity of such reason the distinction between God and man is reduced to an irrelevance, as reason has steadfastly indicated since the earliest critique of Homer. In their mastery of nature, the creative God and the ordering mind are alike. Man's likeness to God consists in sovereignty over existence, in the lordly gaze, in the command (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 6).” From this excerpt we can draw three conclusions:
1. The creative God and the ordering [human] mind are alike, thus human science can hold the same position as God when it comes to truth.

2. Within this Homeric/Platonic idea of reason lies the fundament of our will to control.

3. Every human that uses reason has the potential power of mastery over the relationship to the external world and the other.

We have the godlike ability to efficiently organize and control the world around us through our power over ourself and the other. The difference between the Platonic ‘ideal’ will to control and the Scientific paradigm's will to control is that other Socratic and Platonic ideas limited the way in which the will to control was exerted over the world. We can view this Homeric/Platonic enlightenment thinking as a form of ‘scientism’. Using reason to know and control the world. In Platonism this scientism still had philosophical grounding through a view of death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life. Reason was used to platonically (and thus philosophically) approximate the ideal.

In contrast, although the Scientific paradigm has its roots in philosophy it no longer is grounded by philosophical beliefs, it is instead scientific in its beliefs. This means that science has overtaken philosophy in creating the thought-patterns and beliefs for our way of life and for what we experience as truth in life. In, for example, 2010's ‘The Grand Design', Stephen Hawking, on the first page proclaims: “Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with the modern development in science, particularly physics (Hawking 2010, 5).” Simply put, whereas our perspectives on death used to be philosophical in nature, nowadays these perspectives are scientific in nature. Although I agree with Hawking that the scientific language (physics, mathematics) is hard to grasp for a philosopher not trained in this language, exclaiming philosophy is dead is what creates a problem for the Scientific paradigm. This form of ‘scientism’, the excessive belief in scientific knowledge, cannot lead to a meaningful sense of belonging in the world without returning to philosophy. Philosophical grounding leads to the restoration of the view that death is a necessary condition for a meaningful life.

We are thus able to define the Scientific paradigm on the basis of three things:

1. A change from philosophical to scientific beliefs: whereas the Ancient progenitors of the Scientific paradigm viewed death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life, the Scientific paradigm views death as completely negative.

2. A will to control death: the will to control inherent in the Scientific paradigm holds an excessive belief in scientific knowledge. The belief that we can understand and control anything, even death.

3. The dominant position of science in today's debate on death (think of medical debates on how to handle Covid): genealogically, science has taken God's position as the ‘definer of truth’.
2. The question of immortality

2.1 Critique of the Scientific Paradigm

If we look at the changes in our world in the last 100 years one might observe that the world has become more secular. The reason for this secularization we should consider is an increase in the belief in science over religion. Where God once was, now is science. That is to say, the inherent will to truth expanded into the idolization of science as a truth-maker. Nietzsche argues that science, like God, is a false idol. To Nietzsche, we should notice that the ascetic ideal underlying the Scientific paradigm still tries to find meaning while it is unable to. Therefore, he thinks that the expression of truth that science is able to do is dangerous without constant (philosophical) reflection. Nietzsche also critiques the belief that we can understand and control everything, because we can only get to a proximity to truth. We can get close to the truth, but the absolute truth remains unavailable to us. Nietzsche, furthermore, critiques the ascetic ideal underlying the Scientific paradigm, because it leads to nihilism. Nihilism is a will to nothingness. It is an inability to create meaning in a meaningless world. Therefore it clings to nothingness as better than nothing at all. Nihilism is fighting life in order to preserve life. The way in which the Scientific paradigm operates is thus faulty, because it is unable to accept the reality that we perpetually cannot truly be sure and therefore will never have full control over the external world. By trying to control everything and relieving the world of the magical unknown (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 35-62), we fight life in order to preserve life, instead of living life in a meaningful way.

Although, science touches the real and finds knowledge of the real, it is philosophy, at even the most fundamental stage of science, where science starts and eventually must return to again (Zizek 1999). Science starts off in a philosophical language. That language is translated into a scientific language (physics, mathematics), which creates a model of reality based upon raw experiential data. Scientists, however, are unable to retranslate this language into our experience of representable reality without returning to philosophy in order to reflect and put this ‘data of the real’ into a relational context of meaning.

With the dominance of science today and what we have inherited from Plato and the enlightenment it is almost impossible to think of a world without science. Science has given us technologies and forms of luxury that our ancestors could only have dreamt off. The point thus is not that science is bad, but rather that science needs to be grounded by a philosophical way of thinking that views death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life. Control for the sake of control is bad, but control in order to create symbiotic and homeostatic environments where we can find a meaningful sense of belonging in the world is necessary for humankind to remain, or one might even say, to become healthy. Otherwise, one of the main dangers of the will to control inherent to the Scientific paradigm might be that it will eventually be used to control the human being or go against the sovereign rights of the human being. It may also lead to other detrimental behaviour concerning over-protectiveness, originating from a negative view of death.
2.2 Williams' Makropulos case

The Scientific paradigm views death as something negative. A particularly insightful way to understand what is bad about death is given by Thomas Nagel and his so called ‘deprivation theory’: death “deprives us of future goods, including the very general goods of perception, desire, activity, and thought (Nagel 1970, 74 ; Scheffler 2013, 85).”

This deprivation theory completely goes against the Epicurean conclusions which view death in a positive way, because death can end a person's suffering. The deprivation theory goes against the Epicurean conclusions that death is not bad for the person who dies and that one has no reason to fear death. In Nagel's case, death is bad for the person who dies because they lose everything. They are deprived of their future and everything that it could have entailed. The egocentric subject ‘I’ will stop to exist and therefore it seems logical to protect that ‘I’. So, if death actually is a bad thing it is reasonable to fear death and act upon a way to stop the bad thing from happening. In this case the Scientific paradigm would be right to try to find control over death.

Bernard Williams also rejects the first Epicurean conclusion, however, Williams' conclusion is different from Nagel's conclusion. Williams concludes that death is an evil, although the absence of death would be even worse. So, whereas Nagel concludes that death is an evil, Williams takes the precarious position that death is a necessary evil, because immortality renders life meaningless. This means that while Williams does hold death in a somewhat negative view, he would also disagree with the Scientific paradigm’s protective project of rendering humanity invulnerable. How does Williams come to this conclusion?

Williams' critique of immortality is centered around ‘identity’ and ‘attractiveness’. Identity here means our character, which is based upon our ‘agenda’: what pursuits, goals and aims do we have? What do we categorically and conditionally desire? This agenda explains how we want to live our life. What this means, according to Williams, is that we need to make a choice between boredom and identity. We either get bored because our agenda remains the same and at some point we have done all there is (life thus becomes unattractive) or we change our agenda and with it our identity, which means we cannot relate to ourselves in the way we wanted as our identity has not remained the same (Williams 1993, 73-88). With that change I am not quite me. We thus see that in order for Williams to want immortality or, more importantly, in order for life to be meaningful we need to fulfill two conditions; the identity condition and the attractiveness condition (Fischer 2009, 80). The identity and attractiveness conditions imply that longevity is only a good thing if and only if the prolongation of life leads to a sufficiently meaningful life.

For Williams death is an evil, because of the distinction between categorical and conditional desires (Scheffler 2013, 89). Categorically desiring something means desiring something unconditionally. For example, I have the unconditional and thus categorical desire to watch my niece and nephew grow up. This gives me a reason to keep death at bay, because if I am dead I won't be able to watch them grow up. When your desire is conditional it does not give you a reason to continue living. The example Scheffler uses it that of the dentist. When you continue living, you want to visit the dentist when it is necessary for your dental health, but
you do not go on living in order to go to the dentist. In the dentist example the desire is thus conditional (Scheffler 2013, 88). So, according to Williams, as long as we have categorical desires we have a reason to defy death, because the categorical desire propels us into our future. Death is thus an evil, because, like Nagel, it takes away our futural categorical desires.

Williams explains that “the limitations inherent in maintaining a consistent character will not allow for an unlimited amount of categorical desires (Williams 1993, 79-87).” According to Williams, the problem between maintaining both the attractiveness and identity conditions stem from our categorical desires, because not all categorical desires are compatible. When we are a married man we are not a bachelor and therefore do not have the categorical desires of a bachelor if we adhere to our married persona. Categorical desires thus can preclude one another, therefore there is no unlimited amount of categorical desires we can hold to maintain our identity. Furthermore, we exhaust some or even most categorical desires simply by completing our aim (Williams 1993, 87; Buben 2019, 352). For Williams there is no categorical desire that can fulfill us with joy for eternity, therefore we eventually end up bored and who wants to be bored eternally? The problem for Williams is that we either uphold the identity condition or the attractiveness condition, but never both, because they seem to exclude each other. For this reason Williams views death as an evil, but at the same time does not find the thought of immortality attractive at all. From Williams’ perspective gaining security over death will lead to a life not worth living. Williams thus draws attention to the fact that immortality would take away the conditions for leading a meaningful life. So, although death is an evil, the absence of death would be even worse. Therefore death, contra the Scientific paradigm, is a necessary condition for a meaningful life to Williams.

Samuel Scheffler argued that within Williams’ thought-experiment there is no progression through stages, therefore Scheffler raised a critical point in the discussion on Williams’ thought-experiment on immortality (Scheffler 2013). The way we understand our life is based upon the stages that we live throughout life. Life tends to keep to a natural cycle or arguably a spiral of what we take to be progression. From a baby to a toddler, toddler to a human with theory of mind that now has the ability to relate to others and be aware that other people can lie, to a teenager that rebels against its parents, to an adult that hopefully matured. You might have children and eventually at an older age you might become a grandparent and at any stage you might die. What is clear is that we understand our life based upon the stage of life we are in. Every stage holds its own risks and rewards and its own categorical desires. We mature and deteriorate and because of this maturing and deteriorating of our physical and mental abilities every stage has its own goals, activities and pursuits (Scheffler 2013, 95-96). Because Williams does not account for the natural progression of life, his critique falls short. What it does show us is that we need to meet both the attractiveness and identity condition in order for life to be meaningful. It also shows us that a ‘progression through stages’ is how we experience life, thus losing this progression through stages would mean that we are unable to relate to life in the same way if we are immortal. Therefore it is important to look at what happens to our way of life if we take death out of the equation. What do we gain and what do we lose with the death of death itself? Is the absence of death worse than death itself?
2.2 Risk and Time

What does it mean to live a meaningful life? It may be helpful to take a look at the arguments presented by Martha Nussbaum and Samuel Scheffler (Nussbaum 2009; Scheffler 2013).

It is hard to imagine immortality with a progression through stages. It is also hard to imagine a human life without concepts such as illness, injury, harm, loss and danger. These concepts all mean that in some manner you are at risk of being hurt. As Scheffler argues, we put a lot of effort in overcoming and coping with these concepts (Scheffler 2013, 96-97). The way we understand life is based upon us being temporally bounded. We prioritize our actions based upon limitation and consequence. We tend to avoid harm and strife for concepts such as health, gain, safety, security and benefit. According to Scheffler we have to call the meaning of all these concepts into question when we are temporally unbounded.

On the one hand, Scheffler agrees that in the case of physical immortality things that are meaningful to us now lose all meaning when there is no risk of degradation or death. In the life of the immortal there is a lack of consequences compared to the ‘normal’ life in which decisions can be extremely important for the rest of our lives. An immortal is able to lose great amounts of time, therefore, in most cases, there is no pressure to act. Why do things now if you have eternity to do them later? For this reason, the absence of death would also mean the death of value for Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2009, 226).

According to Nussbaum we should look at immortality from the perspective of the Gods, because what we want to know is to which extent our values and our meaning in life is absent in the case of immortality. Nussbaum tells us that by looking at the Olympian Gods we get a glimpse of what immortality would be like. In this case, Nussbaum argues, life has been changed by two things: a change when it comes to risk and a change when it concerns time (Nussbaum 2009, 227). Meaning that because we are able ‘to end’ we are vulnerable and are temporally limited.

The main argument Nussbaum raises against immortality is that the loss of our temporal limitation, our death, leads to a life devoid of risk. The sacrifice mortal people make to save someone at the risk of their own lives is far greater than when an immortal person would run into a similar situation without the risk of losing his life (Nussbaum 2009, 227–9). Therefore, Nussbaum argues, Gods cannot have courage as we know it. In order to be courageous you must be at risk of losing something. The biggest risk being the chance of losing your life. Not being able to risk things for others also means that the concept of friendship has changed. Clearly, “all relationships whose structure and point is connected with growth, change, and process, would lead to still more remarkable changes, difficult even to imagine (Nussbaum 2009, 228).” In a similar manner a lot of concepts are hit by the ripples that were created by a riskless life. Take for example one of Aristotle’s favorite virtues: moderation. Moderation will keep a person alive in most cases, for example in eating a moderate amount of food and drinking a moderate amount of alcohol. Moderation plays a big role in life, but an immortal might rarely need to moderate. It is hard to imagine a life in which you have no need of moderation.
Scheffler emphasizes the importance of the prioritization of our actions in mortal life. He argues that we need to prioritize our actions, because we cannot indefinitely repeat our choices (Scheffler 2013, 99). When we live our life, we constantly choose the things we need to prioritize, what are the things that are worth caring for and what are the things or projects that give purpose to our existence? The way in which we are limited by our vulnerability and the limitation of the time we have while alive makes us aware and pressures us to make choices. The fear of death stems from the awareness of our own mortality and the awareness of our own vulnerability. To Nussbaum it is here that we find out what is meaningful to us in life, because we are pressured by the finitude of our temporal scarcity to choose. Nussbaum and Scheffler thus argue, through these ‘risk arguments’, that the things that create the dynamics of our life have a greater value to us because of our temporal being. We risk ourselves in order to love, cherish and form intimate connections. Therefore, control over death would not lead to a more secure ground, but would rather uproot our known temporarily and vulnerably limited existence where most of our choices matter. To Scheffler it is not a normal form of immortality that we seek. What we really want is that our life remains as a version of how we live now (Scheffler 2013, 100). At the same time it might already be clear that this can only remain as a wish, because life would not remain the same if we were to become immortal.

The major counterargument for these risk arguments is that there are things that are not a matter of life and death, yet are still meaningful to us. The power-games of politics, the dramas of life and getting higher up within a chain or a hierarchy. Imagine becoming the best gamer or professional athlete, the C.E.O. of a major company or even the president of a state.

Nussbaum and Scheffler, however, argue that it is questionable that immortal people would care for such things as courage and sacrifice in politics and similar things without the more profound background that temporal limitation and vulnerability give (Nussbaum 2009, 229; Scheffler 2013, 204). This would mean that it remains questionable if the necessary identity and attractiveness conditions would be met if we were to become immortals. The risk arguments thus show that death should not be viewed as something negative. Death decides the structure of our life and without that structure we would become unhinged from our relations as we know them. Therefore to Nussbaum and Scheffler death is a necessary condition for a meaningful life.

2.3 Fates worse than death

Although Nussbaum and Scheffler give us valuable observations on the meaning of life in relation to risk and death, Niko Kolodny has taken issue with their position (Kolodny 2013). Therefore, we will take a look at Kolodny’s argument.

Kolodny argues that there are risks for immortals that are heightened. Imagine, for example, being stuck in prison or buried under the ground for eternity. The risks of the immortal are heightened by the inability of being able to die. There are massive disadvantages to not being able to die. It is easy to give examples where you remain, but
you are unable to actually do something about the position you are in as an immortal. A good example Kolodny gives is eternally losing the love of someone you care for. The mortal would not have to wait all that long for the relief that death gives (Buben 2019, 357-358). Therefore we can call these examples ‘a worse fate than death’. The immortal would be haunted forever, trapped in a Stoics nightmare unable to commit suicide. Kolodny even offers the argument that we could end up failing to be ourself for eternity. Which means you would have to live with yourself for eternity, unhappy with who you are. (Kolodny 2013, 167) A fate that also would not be satisfying at all. Kolodny's examples aim to show that death is not the only thing that makes us have to risk. However, because of Kolodny's examples, which show that risks for the immortal lead to worse fates than death, the absence of death is arguably worse than death itself. We thus return to Williams' conclusion that death is a necessary condition for a meaningful life, because the absence of death would be worse than death itself.
3. The Existentialist views of Death

3.1 The Existentialist Christian view in Kierkegaard

The Scientific paradigm leads to cosmic nihilism, the conclusion that there is no inherent meaning in the cosmos. Alternatives to the Scientific paradigm are the Existentialist views, which show us a non-nihilistic way of living. Existentialist views are philosophical ways of living that lead to the conclusion that we are meaning-makers, that which defines Existentialism as a view. The Kierkegaardian perspective is Christian in nature, this perspective shows us ‘the leap of faith’ which is offered as a way to find an unconditional trust in life. Life seen in such a way does not view death as something negative. This way of thinking about death is in line with the Ancient philosophical views of death we have looked at in chapter one. We will start by taking a closer look at Soren Kierkegaard's Existentialist view of death (Kierkegaard 1992, 2009, 2013).

Kierkegaard’s aim in writing about death is to explain a figurative martyrdom of “dying to the world” (Buben 2016, 52). This figurative martyrdom is informed by Augustine and Blaise Pascal. Kierkegaard explains this martyrdom in his early writings, in which he is critical of Socrates for not being concerned about the possibility of the lack of an afterlife. Socrates rightly prepares for the afterlife through his love of wisdom, but Socrates does not take the ‘leap of faith’. Socrates does not fully surrender his ‘self’. Socrates is too disinterested in the salvation of the afterlife that he seems to lack the passion of faith. Kierkegaard introduces the leap of faith as a way of unconditional surrender to life. A form of freedom is acquired through faith in life, allowing one to risk life in order to live it.

3.2 The Kierkegaardian leap of faith

To emphasize how the leap of faith serves as a radical alternative to the Scientific paradigm’s view of death as something negative, I will now elaborate on Kierkegaard’s view of death and the central role of the leap of faith within that view.

Throughout Kierkegaard’s early writings examples can be found on how the leap of faith rests on a trust that letting go will bring you closer to the divine. For example, in Either/Or Kierkegaard teaches how you can learn to die to your selfishness, because dying to your selfishness entails being part of something bigger than yourself, something bigger than worldly attachment of ego (Buben 2016, 48). In Fear and Trembling Kierkegaard tells us that “only through infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity (Kierkegaard 2013, 94 ; Buben 2016, 48)” This means that only if I infinitely resign myself I take the leap of faith, because only then do I give up all worldly attachments. Only then do I truly have faith that God is a providing source. Kierkegaard uses the story of Abraham as an example of a leap of faith (Kierkegaard 2013, 37). Abraham does not know why God would order him to kill his son. He knows, however, that he needs to sacrifice his son in order to show his faith in God. Thus Abraham decides to kill his own son. The moment Abraham strikes out to kill his son he is stopped by God. In return for Abraham’s resolve and faith in God he is rewarded. The moral of this story is that the aim of faith is to ground you to the eternally
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divine through sacrifice. If you have faith in God, the Universe or any other conventional denominator you might believe in, your faith will be rewarded if you take the leap of faith. To Kierkegaard taking the leap of faith means transcending the threshold of vulnerability, you risk life in order to live life.

In his middle writings Kierkegaard continues his views of death in ‘At a graveside’. In this book he explains that “The thought of death gives the earnest person the right momentum in life and the right goal toward which he directs his momentum (Kierkegaard 2009, 83).” This means that the ‘earnest person’ is propelled into action because of his relation to death. The earnest person, is earnest, because he contemplates his own death (and contemplating death for Kierkegaard is a prerequisite for a meaningful way of life). This means that death is seen as a catalyst for living. Death grants us momentum, it works as a force for moving us forward in life. We can understand this in a similar manner as Scheffler’s and Nussbaum’s risk arguments in chapter two. The reason death works as a catalyst for the earnest person, according to Kierkegaard, is because you do not know when it arrives. Your demise at some point in time is always a certainty, but at which point in time is unknown to you. This uncertainty can be crippling and therefore we must focus on what is certain; that we will die at some point (Kierkegaard 2009, 91-99 ; Buben 2016, 50). Thus Kierkegaard asks us to memento mori, to remember that we will die.

Kierkegaard continues by explaining that the earnest person has an appropriate fear of death. In Kierkegaard’s explanation of what an appropriate fear of death is there seems to be a balance between two opposites: on the one hand we should fear death. On the other hand, we should not fear death to the point that we cannot live life in a healthy way. Yet, this is not precisely as Kierkegaard means it, because he wants to hold a remaining tension between living life and fearing death (Kierkegaard 2009, 81-88 ; Buben 2016, 51). The earnest person seeks to take the leap of faith continually and with urgency, because the earnest person has an appropriate fear of death. Which is another way of saying that the leap of faith leads to a meaningful life.

In the evaluation of faith the Kierkegaardian Existentialist view differs from the Scientific paradigm. The leap of faith involves giving up your reason, whereas reason is valued over faith in the Scientific paradigm. For Kierkegaard giving up your understanding begins with suffering. Kierkegaard explains that being a human of faith entails a great deal of suffering. This Christian suffering is clearly visible in the notion of martyrdom (Kierkegaard 1992, 292). Figurative martyrdom is a dying to immediacy and a dying to oneself, as taking the leap of faith requires ego-death. Which means that you figuratively kill yourself in order to expose yourself wholly and completely in the eyes of God and humble yourself in his glory. Self-sacrifice means the giving up of oneself and the things that attach you to the world, but it also means giving up your ‘reason’ and with the giving up of your reason you give up your understanding. You crucify your understanding (Kierkegaard 1992, 559). From the Scientific perspective faith excludes reason, which raises an incompatibility with this line of Existentialist thinking. However, the Scientific perspective might not be aware of the epistemological regress that needs faith as a prerequisite for knowledge, in the need to have a ‘justified true belief’. Even a priori knowledge is arguably build upon faith in premade agreements. For instance that ‘a bachelor is an unmarried man’ is based upon a premade
agreement in language. Faith is defined as ‘the belief or the complete trust in someone or something’. When we look at the Scientific paradigm we see that this view values reason highly, while they also base their understanding upon faith. In turn this means that they pretend to know while they actually only might know, proclaiming a proximity to truth as the truth. The argument that Kierkegaard makes is that if we take the leap of faith and let go of having to understand and control everything we will have a better chance of overcoming the struggles in life. In this way Kierkegaard's leap of faith provides a way for living a meaningful life.

To conclude, Kierkegaard's Existentialist view of death is an alternative to the Scientific paradigm's negative view of death. What we should take away from the leap of faith is that the choice of trust allows us to acknowledge how open, exposed and vulnerable we are. In turn the leap of faith allows us to choose to still go on and risk being hurt by going into the world. Only acceptance of how we are limited by our vulnerability allows us to free ourselves from the depressing gloom of ensured future doom. Trying to control the risks of life will only lead to a life without the things that make life worth living. For example, 'having loved and lost is better than not having loved at all' is a common expression for a reason. It is having risked being hurt in order to gain love by making the choice to live by remaining open, exposed and vulnerable. To gain meaning something has to be at stake.

The fact that we will all end up equal when we are dead means, according to Kierkegaard, that death should humble us. The insecurity of not knowing when death comes and the powerlessness in the face of death show our place as a flower that eventually blooms and withers with the seasons of the world. It humbles us, because we are aware of our tiny significance in a large indifferent cosmos. This idea goes against the belief of scientism that we can know and control it all. As such the leap of faith functions as a tool for acceptance.

Within the Kierkegaardian notion of true belief lies a clear, almost stoical, acceptance that whatever happens happens, but you will always be better off when making the leap of faith. Something we also see in the notion of Camus' 'absurd', facing life's hardship and life's inherent meaninglessness and still saying yes to life (Carroll 2007, 53-66). Simply said, this acceptance will be the final affirmation of life. Kierkegaard asks us to unconditionally surrender to life. The leap of faith therefore provides a way to live life that is radically different from the Scientific paradigm. To Kierkegaard death is a necessary condition for a meaningful life.

3.3 Dasein as being-towards-death

Whereas Kierkegaard bases his philosophy on the notion of faith, Heidegger bases his philosophy on the notion of reason. Therefore, I introduce Heidegger's notion of Dasein as an Existentialist ontology which gives a secular view of death. Dasein helps deepen our understanding of the temporal dynamic of human life, through its care structure. For example, the very notion of 'Dasein' holds our relation towards death to be a necessary condition for (a meaningful) life.
In Being and Time Heidegger enquires into an ontological question: what does it mean to be? His enquiry leads him to an interpretation of being as ‘Dasein’. In order to understand Dasein, Heidegger needs to take death into account. This relation between death and Dasein is the part that is interesting to our own enquiry. In order for Dasein to be existentially authentic and total, Heidegger needs to view Dasein in its wholeness. It is here that Heidegger runs into death, precisely because Dasein's wholeness cannot be understood without the necessary relation with death (Heidegger 2008, 277). Similar to the Epicureans, death is the event on which Dasein stops being. Yet, unlike Epicurus, Heidegger sees the need for a relationship with death. In this case death also is when we are, not in the way that Dasein is living dead, but in the way that we always live with death as our inevitable future. This can also be understood as a critique of the Scientific paradigm's will to control death, which will leave us unable to ontologically explain what it means ‘to be’.

3.4 Dasein’s care structure

Dasein's wholeness is best explained through the ‘care structure’ of Dasein. This care structure is the being of Dasein and is defined as the “ahead- of- itself, Being-already- in- (the-world) and as Being- alongside (entities encountered within-the- world) (Heidegger 2008, 236).“ This means that Dasein is thrown into the world and lives with its culture already determined at birth. After that Dasein’s capabilities are further limited through Dasein's own actions and genetic capabilities. Dasein projects its possibilities which are limited by its past. The projects Dasein engages in are in the present. Dasein's focus is on its unfolding towards the future.

In order for Dasein to be, Dasein needs something that maintains its being-towards-death. To Heidegger this maintenance is the anticipation of death (Heidegger 2008, 306-307). This anticipation entails that there is no actualization, because there is nothing in its essence that actualizes as Dasein is unfolding at all times (Buben 2016, 101). This means that to some degree the anticipation of death leads to a freedom of not being anything specific. This authenticity, however, is not completely free to do everything, because Dasein always stands in relation to its thrown-in-ness. To explain this further, Heidegger uses the example of things that ripen. The thing that ripens (or unfolds) has it in itself to ripen. In the same manner we ripen and carry over death with us until it takes place. Dasein is thus unfolding until the moment of death and this is why we are always in relation to death. Heidegger phrases Dasein here as “being-towards-death and not being-at-an-end (Heidegger 2008, 284-288 ; Buben 2016, 93-94).” We could understand that there is no actualization while the unfolding takes place, upon death the subject is no longer unfolding, so in the same way that we become aware of the tool when it breaks down, we become aware of the actualization upon death.

It is important to note that the time and space in which you are born determine in which culture you are born and raised, which limits the futurity of Dasein to the possibilities of its being in the present. So, what does this anticipation of death grant us if not complete freedom? Anticipation of death grants us the responsibility to act and the need to act as...

The futurity of Dasein is thus an anticipation of death and therefore a relation towards death. This anticipation of death accounts for the futural aspect of Dasein. Nevertheless, the projection of Dasein into possibilities is limited by its pastness, because we are thrown into a world and body that is limited. This means we have an almost unlimited amount of possibilities which is dependent upon and limited by the situations we are thrown into.

This is why the presentness is derived from the pastness and futurity and why “Every Dasein always exists factically. It is not a free-floating self-projection; but its character is determined by thrownness as a fact of the entity which it is (Heidegger 2008, 320-321).” Dasein is this presentness by relating to its pastness and futurity correctly (Heidegger 2008, 328-330). Anticipation is the correct way for Dasein to relate to its future, whereas resoluteness is Dasein's correct way to relate to its past, because through resoluteness Dasein takes responsibility for its past and thus its thrownness. This connection of past-present-future is Dasein's essential care structure, which is also known as anticipatory resoluteness to assert authentic presentness (Buben 2016, 106). This authentic presentness is the aspect which makes us responsible for ourself and thus allows for the choice to risk life in order to live life.

The notion of Dasein as a being-towards-death already necessitates death. In this view who we are is constructed in relation to death and therefore viewing death as something negative would uproot the way in which we constitute ourself and our life. Thus this existentially ontological view offers a radical alternative to the Scientific paradigm by having enquired into what it means ‘to be’.

3.5 conclusion on the Existentialist views

Both for Kierkegaard and Heidegger the goal of their discussion on death is about meaning. They aim to make us the master over meaning in our own existence, either through God like in Kierkegaard or through an ontology that transforms being into becoming, like in Heidegger. Meaning is a very important aspect of human life. For example, the Christian thought of post-mortem divine judgement is about giving meaning to suffering. When you live you suffer, but proper actions might allow you to go to heaven. Therefore, your suffering gains meaning. In turn, you might be able to overcome the struggles of life, because they are meaningful. If our suffering means something it gains a positive aspect, it means that we do not suffer for no reason at all. Having a reason for suffering makes the suffering bearable. Kierkegaard's Christian thoughts on dying to the world and becoming close to the divine through an unconditional surrendering of the self does this exact thing. It makes suffering meaningful. It gives us a reason to overcome our struggles in order to overcome life. Choosing the leap of faith and therefore choosing an unconditional surrendering of the self allows one to trust life and trust that your suffering is meaningful.
Heidegger has explained a different way in which suffering becomes meaningful. What Heidegger shows us is that we have a responsibility towards ourself and our own choices in life. Like the Stoics we have control over our own choices. This means that on the onset we can fail life by making the wrong choices. This also means that we can live life by making the right choices. Knowing this responsibility causes an anxiety to protect ourself, because we feel vulnerable, because we cannot fully control what we do not understand. We are no longer afraid of God's wrath, but now we are not sure what to exactly be afraid of. We have become afraid of the unknown. Afraid of the things we do not comprehend. One solution is the Kierkegaardian leap of faith, because it places us in a position of trust. We could place a different solution for Dasein. A wrong choice is only wrong, because it leads to an experience of suffering. Yet, this suffering teaches us to choose differently. In failing we grow, but only if we take the opportunity for learning our lesson that is provided with this wrong choice. In this way we gain control over our suffering. Arguably, not all suffering is caused by ourselves. But, the manner in which we suffer is completely in our control. It is our personal responsibility to deal with how we feel. Heidegger’s idea of Dasein puts us in a position of choice, although slightly limited, our freedom of choice allows us to overcome our suffering. It allows us to overcome life by making even suffering meaningful without the need of a God. To Heidegger, life is about control over ourself. In this way it is a stark contrast to the Scientific paradigm that is about control over the other, over the world and over the unknown.

The Existentialist views are about life affirmation. They are about overcoming the problems of life and in that sense can go along with science very well. There is, however, a great difference: Existentialism does not lead to nihilism, nor to a view of death as something negative. What Existentialism offers us, is a meaningful way to relate to death. Therefore viewing death in an Existentialist way can provide us with a proper sense of belonging in the world.
4. The relationship to the other

4.1 The Existentialist views and the other

Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger speak about the frivolous everyday activities we do in relation to the other. The point that Kierkegaard makes is that because death remains inevitable all the small, worldly stuff that we do will be erased by the equalizing factor of death (Kierkegaard 2009, 91; Buben 2016, 52). When we are able to see the insignificant nature of most everyday activities we might start looking for activities that grant a higher form of meaning. When we have found this higher form of meaning we are sure that we have lived a meaningful life even if there is no afterlife. Although Kierkegaard tells us about how death should lead us to do less frivolous activities with the other, Kierkegaard does not go into detail on how we experience the death of the other. He only speaks of our personal relation to our own death.

According to Heidegger, death is also a personal thing, because we do not have access to the death of the other in the sense that we do not know how it feels when you die or what happens to us (Heidegger 2008, 284). From this idea Heidegger continues explain two things:

1. Dasein has a sense of self, a ‘mineness’.
2. Death is seen as an existential phenomenon, it ends life, yet is also always a part of our ‘mineness’.

Heidegger stresses that Dasein can only rely on itself to explain itself, because the relation to the other is accidental at most. This means Dasein is responsible for itself and its own unfolding through choices (Buben 2016, 96). The problem here is that Heidegger does not really show that the relation to the other is accidental at most. Although Dasein is responsible for itself and its own choices, there is also no reason to assume that the other is not part of these choices. Rather, Dasein begins with the choices of the other. For instance:

1. The choice of the parents to birth a person.
2. The culture in which we are born is made by the choices of the other.
3. To a large extent the choices of the other will influence you your whole life.

This means that Heidegger has to account for the other in order to have a complete ontological concept of being.

In a certain way Dasein shows that our birth is really our death sentence as we are thrown into this world and from that moment of thrown-in-ness we are ahead of ourself in being-towards-death. In a Kierkegaardian fashion Heidegger takes the forgetting of the fact that we will die one day and being distracted by the arbitrary and frivolous everyday things and
activities as fleeing from your authentic ‘ownmostness’ or ‘mineness’. These activities simply distract you from the important things as being-towards-death (Heidegger 2008, 295-296). The inauthentic people that get distracted by the everyday activities are called ‘the they’ by Heidegger. ‘The they’ take on the Epicurean idea of not having to think and worry about death. They think it is far away instead of always around the corner and they make death impersonal, belonging to nobody in particular (Heidegger 2008, 296-297). This means that ‘the they’ constitute a form of the other, because the other is either another Dasein or the other is part of the they. However, this distinction says nothing about the death of the other and how it influences Dasein. Therefore, the essential part missing in Heidegger’s ontology is an account of the death of the other. Thus, both Existentialist views lack this account of the relation to the other’s death.

4.2 Dasein as ontological starting point

The relation to the other is an important part in what makes life meaningful, therefore I will complement Heidegger’s notion of Dasein by going into detail on our relation to the death of the other. To create meaningful connections to the other notions such as openness, vulnerability, trust and acceptance become a demand. We need to transcend our vulnerability by accepting the risk behind the vulnerability. We need to trust that when we connect to the other we will not be hurt. Even more so, I will argue that we must choose to remain vulnerable although we know we will be hurt. To lose what we gained is an inevitability. In this way we find freedom in our acceptance of vulnerability.

The relation to the other also allows me to offer the idea of a symbiotic, interdependent relation between the Existentialist view of death and the instrumentality of science in order to create a meaningful sense of belonging in the world. It is important to offer a solution, because it is almost unthinkable that the Scientific way of thinking will vanish in the upcoming future. By offering a solution I hope to show that there is no need to give up science as an instrument. The idea here is to take the best of both paradigms in order to gain greater understanding on the fabrics of our reality. The relationship to the other explains that co-operation through vulnerability leads to relationships that are more meaningful, therefore we should look at how we can co-operate in openness.

Dasein is responsible for it’s relation to the other. In Ancient Greece two notions were very important and related. One constituted the self from 1) caring for thyself and 2) knowing thyself (Foucault et al. 1988, 22). Over time knowing oneself became the same as caring for oneself. Seen in this way Dasein correctly relates to itself by knowing the responsibility inherent in its being that is always in becoming. Dasein knows that it is its past, present and future which together help constitute its being-a-whole. This responsibility towards itself and the relation with death, its anticipation of death, renders Dasein anxious and vulnerable. Yet, what Heidegger leaves out on purpose is Dasein’s connection and the relation towards the other. Indirectly the relation with the other might be defined by ‘the they’, but there is also more than one Dasein, so how does Dasein relate to other Dasein?
4.3 The relationship towards the other

When we look at our relationship to the other one thing becomes clear: we call it ‘the other’ precisely because the other does not fully share our own ‘ownmostness’ or ‘mineness’. The other works as a mirror that reflects who we are. This happens when we interact with the other.

The other is divided into two aspects. One aspect is ‘sameness’ and the other aspect is ‘otherness’. Both aspects show us who we are either through the negation of the other’s otherness or through similarity with the other’s sameness. In the sameness we find the aspects of ourself that we like or loathe. In the otherness we find the things we lack, detest or admire. Whereas the sameness is usually the aspect upon which we connect, the otherness is the aspect of the other that scares us, precisely because it is unknown to us. We differ from each other in a different way than we differ from a wooden table or a dog. We are both ‘Dasein’ or ‘human’, so it is within this classification of being that we differ from each other in sameness and otherness.

Our growth as a person comes from opening up to our vulnerability. We ourselves are a mirror to the other, because we are sameness and otherness to them. What this means is that the other becomes a lesson to us either through the like or loathe of our own characteristic in the sameness that the other has or through the opening up of ourself in order to learn from the unknown otherness to grow. Although we can also feel admiration for the other and look up to their otherness, the other as a lesson remains. Admiration for the other’s otherness simply has a lower threshold of vulnerability to overcome in order for us to grow, because it inspires growth without struggle with the other, but rather through struggle with yourself. Then again obsessive admiration is detrimental, because it may lead us to striving for something that is not right for us or forever out of our reach. In that case we might remain in a perpetual struggle without a chance of overcoming.

Struggle helps us to connect and it helps us to find sameness, because we all struggle and we all hurt. This means we can find compassion for the other. Without death there will be less struggle, and therefore less reason to connect and come together. Vulnerability is necessary for our growth. Growth, in turn, happens in relation towards the other. By learning from the reflection that the other grants us on ourself and the otherness that we can invite into ourselves we grow and mature. This is our becoming, this is our unfolding realistically in relation to the other.

When we grow or change there is always an ending of sorts. Symbolically a part of us dies in order to make space for the new. Death can symbolically be understood as ‘transformation’. Even our very cells die off to make room for new cells. Symbolically, death is nothing but the necessary transformation from A to B. As Nussbaum told us in chapter two we live life in stages. From baby to child to adult and to elder. With every progression to a new stage in life elements of our social roles and identity are lost. Thus, becoming an adult is for instance the death of the child. Mental growth comes from the death of old thought-patterns, which usually change in relation to the other. This goes to show that we should consider death to be a natural phenomenon and absolutely necessary for a meaningful life. Everyday things
die in order to make room for the new. In order to grow we need to allow ourselves to accept the death of who we were. Moreover, it shows that in order to grow we also need to be able to open up and be vulnerable in our relation to the other. If both Dasein and the other is able to remain open and vulnerable the connection between the two will deepen in honesty and will lead to a symbiotic mutually beneficial life of growth. We need to cooperate through transparency. Complete transparency leads to trust, because nothing remains hidden.

Through this idea of the relation to the other we are able to explain why and how the death of the other actually impacts us. The more we connect to someone on either the sameness we like, the otherness that we admire, or the otherness that we have made into sameness through learning from the other, the closer we feel to them. The closer we feel to someone the more the other has become a part of us. This is why relationships, friendly and romantic can be so strong. With the death of the other we lose this part of ourself, but also every struggle we have faced together and the experiences that we had together. This is why the death of the other can feel like a tremendous loss for us. We lose the other and at the same time a part of ourself. A relation, a strong connection that makes our lives more meaningful. We lose a part of our identity when we lose the relation. The temporal limitation that death makes us face strengthens these relations and connections even more through the constant choices we make to gain this connection. If we were to overcome death we would lose these strong connections. We would lose the very things that make life most meaningful.

Through this idea of the relation to the other apathy can be explained. The further away the other often is, the more we do not care for the other's death, we simply do not feel a connection to them. There are, however, underlying beliefs of compassion that can shatter this apathy. A belief we are the same no matter how far apart we live. A belief that everyone deserves to have access to food, water, healthcare, legal representation, sovereignty over their own body and a roof above their head. Or simply the drive for humanity to survive or even thrive. It is empathy, the ability to understand the other from their perspective and their belief-system that allows us to transcend complications standing in the way of symbiosis. Empathy is the recognition of sameness. It is the actual standing in someone else's shoes, not from a position of what you would do in that position, but from a position of what you would do if you held their convictions. In some way empathy asks you, in a Kierkegaardian fashion, to surrender a part of your ‘self’ in order to comprehend the position of the other.

All in all, what we end up with is a form of Dasein that actualizes itself through the lessons and reflection of the other. This introduces meaningful relations and connection and emphasizes a need for death as something that throws us into action. Death pressures us to live. This is also the reason why we should not alleviate the fear of death. Instead we need to accentuate the choice to risk life, because opening up to the other in order to grow demands this vulnerability. Although death renders us vulnerable, we still need to choose to open up rather than close up or become defensive or protective. Thus life itself demands this vulnerability so we can authentically live a meaningful life. If we want to become diamonds in life we need pressure and heat. Death is the fire that spurs us into the
experience we are here for. To live life is to risk life, only because there are consequences such as death.

What this means is that although we might often feel that death is a bad thing, because it takes away our future goods or the existence of the ones we love, it is very important to acknowledge the way in which our life benefits from the limitations posed by death. The beauty of living life comes from the consequences of our choices, from the connections we have with others and from the personal growth and progression through the natural stages of life. There is a circle (or spiral) of life and if we are lucky or made the right choices we are able to ripen and pick up the fruit of our labor in seeing for instance the lives of our children or even their children unfold as well. We must accept that the ending of the old generation must happen in order for the fostering of the new generations. If we are able to accept our own death and the death of the other at some point in life we are able to experience the fullness of life through the meaningfulness of our relations. Because we accept our vulnerability we choose to experience that fullness. If we want to experience the fullness of life we must once again find the proper meaningful sense of belonging in the world by valuing our relation to the other highly. We can make this happen by working together to form a symbiosis between philosophical wisdom and scientific knowledge. This symbiosis and the acceptance of death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life allows us to overcome the meaninglessness the Scientific paradigm is leading us towards. We must return to a correct evaluation of death, otherwise we will lose the meaning of death for life.
Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to evaluate the meaning of death for life in order to understand how we should view death today. In order to evaluate the meaning of death for life we looked at differing paradigms to grasp how they have viewed death and in what way death held a position of meaning in the life of those who held those paradigms. I critically assessed the current dominant western view on death and argued for an alternative Existentialist view that inherently allows for a way of life that affirms life instead of the current view that, as I have claimed, leads us towards nihilism. To accomplish the goal of understanding how we should view death today, I have argued that our relationship to the other should be emphasized.

In order to differentiate between paradigms of death I introduced Adam Buben's framework. The paradigms differed on the basis of three questions: is there a possible afterlife, do they reflect upon death in daily life and do they alleviate the fear of death? I also added a fourth concluding question: is death considered a necessary condition for a meaningful life? The answer to this last question showed a big difference between the Ancient views of death and the Scientific paradigm.

The Platonic paradigm viewed death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life. We should approximate death in life in order to be close to the ideal.

The Epicurean paradigm viewed death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life. Death makes our actions in life more important.

The Stoic paradigm viewed death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life. Suicide gives you control over your own death. Furthermore, they viewed death as a return to the source, true tranquillity through death.

The Christian paradigm viewed death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life. Death brings one close to God. We should approximate death in life in order to be close to the divine.

The Scientific paradigm views death as something negative. The Scientific paradigm has taken over the role of 'truth-maker'. The will to control inherent in the Scientific paradigm wants to understand and control the unknown. Death is the great unknown. Therefore, the Scientific paradigm aims to control death. This view does not accept the importance of death and in turn devalues the meaning of death for life. Whereas the Ancient views considered death a necessary condition for a meaningful life, the Scientific paradigm considered death as completely negative.

In chapter two I first introduced Friedrich Nietzsche to explain how the Scientific paradigm leads to nihilism and is therefore unable to lead to a life of meaning. In addition I critiqued the Scientific paradigm on the basis of their 'will to control' and the lack of philosophical reflection.
To evaluate the Scientific view of death, the view that death is bad, I introduced Nagel's deprivation theory. By introducing Bernard Williams' boredom arguments, we noticed that death might be a bad thing, but the absence of death would be even worse. In order for life, normal, prolonged or immortal to be meaningful we need to meet the attractiveness and identity conditions.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of what makes life meaningful I introduced Martha Nussbaum and Samuel Scheffler's risk arguments, which argued that the absence of death would take away the dynamics of life and therefore be a bad thing.

These risk arguments had been contested by Niko Kolodny, who argued that although we would lose certain risks, other risks would be heightened if we were immortal. Having argued that these heightened risks must be understood as fates worse than death, we concluded that the absence of death is worse than death itself.

The aim of chapter three was to give a radical alternative to the Scientific paradigm's view of death. I began by introducing Kierkegaard's Christian Existentialist view that taught us the leap of faith as an unconditional surrender to life and a commitment to life-affirmation, which he offered as the remedy to nihilism. Kierkegaard emphasized that to risk life is to live life, which was in line with Nussbaum's and Scheffler's risk arguments.

Heidegger's Dasein showed us an Existentialist ontology which gave a secular view of death. Whereas Kierkegaard's Existentialist view was based upon the notion of faith, Heidegger's view was based upon the notion of reason. Dasein inherently relates our being with death. We are now a being in becoming, we are a being towards death. Precisely, because we see ourselves as a being towards death, we constitute ourself and we identify ourself within this relation towards our demise. Our whole life, from the start, is thus based upon the fact that we will die at some point. Until that point we, as Dasein, are responsible for ourself. It is our responsibility to affirm life. In this way Heidegger offered a radical alternative to the Scientific paradigm. He explained a way of being that does not lead to nihilism.

The radical Existentialist alternatives did not account for the death of the other. They held that we do not subjectively experience the death of the other. However, the death of the other influences our lives to a large extent. Therefore, in chapter four I go into detail on our relation to the other and the death of the other.

Informed by Nussbaum’s and Scheffler’s risk arguments I emphasized how the notions of openness, vulnerability and acceptance are vital elements in making life meaningful through our connection to the other. These concepts show the importance of our responsibility. We need to choose to remain vulnerable in order to gain a more meaningful relation to the other. In turn, the acceptance of our vulnerability allows us to live with the inevitability of suffering that accompanies our relations.

The relation to the other also allowed me to offer the idea of a symbiotic, interdependent relation between the Existentialist view of death and the instrumentality of science in order to create a meaningful sense of belonging in the world. It is of major importance that our
view of death becomes a view that sees death as a necessary condition for a meaningful life once again. We should allow Existentialist views to inform our way of scientific thinking in order to establish a form of lasting meaning, which the Scientific paradigm does not allow for. We should focus on gaining a trust in life that allows us to accept the inevitable truth that to gain something is to eventually lose that something. We need to accept our vulnerability in order to keep living life. Only by risking life do we actually live it. We cannot keep sheltering and protecting life if it means that we devalue life.
Bibliography


