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Death in life: approaches to the contemporary denial of death in theoretical & experimental psychology and continental philosophy

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Death in Life: Approaches to the Contemporary Denial of Death in Theoretical & Experimental Psychology and Continental Philosophy

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Abstract

Using an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis explores the theme of death in life. This thesis particularly examines the work of Phillipe Ariès, Ernest Becker, Terror Management theorists (TMT), Martin Heidegger, and Friedrich Nietzsche. These thinkers are united in their diagnosis of a severe and unhealthy contemporary denial of death. Death has never been repressed as thoroughly as it is in the current era in western culture, to the point that the exclusion of death may well be the characteristic that centrally distinguishes, and threatens the welfare of, our age. However, as I show in Chapter One, in a number of previous historical epochs people have understood death as a fundamental and constitutive aspect of life, making it clear that death need not be denied as it is now. In Chapters Two and Three, I describe the psychological theory and experimental research that asserts our denial of death oftentimes leads to negative attitudes and the harming of others who are different from us. Although the psychological approach succeeds in its critique of our rejection of death, I argue that its positive response proves less than satisfying. At this point, in Chapters Four and Five, the thesis turns to representatives of continental philosophy, who advance an alternative way of relating to death. These philosophers explain that it is because we die that we can take hold of the possibilities of our lives. They suggest that we have the possibility of authentically understanding ourselves as the mortal creatures we are, affirming and even expressing gratitude for death as a meaning-giving element in life. Thus, death need not be the regrettable moment of our demise, but an essential aspect of who we are as human beings.

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Introduction: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Theme of Death in Life

A number of years ago I stumbled upon a documentary titled "Flight from Death: The Quest for Immortality." Captivated, I listened to various intellectuals and thinkers discuss how humans deal with their mortality. In this, it was the scientists who fascinated me most, for nowhere before had I heard of experimental scientists investigating such existential matters. I was impressed by the courage it took for these scientists to confront a subject matter typically left to the arts and poetry, or perhaps to theology and philosophy. Fascinated by this unique existential-scientific perspective, I read some of the published studies conducted by these researchers who were working in a subfield of psychology called *Terror Management Theory* (TMT). In the documentary, many of these researchers referenced an anthropologist named Ernest Becker, so I set myself the task of also familiarizing myself with his works.

Interestingly, when I brought Becker and TMT to the attention of the psychology professors in my MA program, I was met with hesitation, even unease. The few people who had heard of this area of psychology seemed to think it highly questionable, and they recommended I pursue other topics for course projects. The limited experiments read about in class that investigated anything about our mortality usually only involved participants in the elderly population or people with terminal illnesses. Furthermore, when authors of articles, professors, and fellow students could not avoid talking about death, I noticed them using indirect language such as "pass away" or "perish." I was shocked that no one in the psychology department seemed to care to acknowledge, let alone investigate, this aspect of our existence, an aspect that affects every single human being and does so in such a profound way. Considering that psychology is the examination of the human

functioning, the topic of death and its relation to life, including the revolutionary work of Becker and TMT, seemed to me in need of much more consideration than it was receiving.

Despite my excitement for the ingenuity of the scientific examination of death in life, as I better familiarized myself with the work, I came up against what I saw as a significant limitation of the scientific approach. Through Becker and TMT's descriptions of how our mortality influences our everyday thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, I began to see how I am constantly affected by my finitude. However, Becker and TMT were unable to help me understand what, if anything, could or should be done about it. As I continued my interdisciplinary education, my studies in continental philosophy seemed to address the gap left by Becker and TMT. In particular, Martin Heidegger's rigorous ontological study of what he calls *Dasein*, something like 'human existence,' and Friedrich Nietzsche's lived and embodied philosophical methodology seemed to me to speak about death in the way that was required, namely as a part of who I am as a human being. As I pursued the topic of mortality, I was introduced to the work of Phillipe Ariès, which helped me gain a historical context of the concept of death in the Western world.

This project was not started in attempt to fully elucidate the massive, elusive concept of death, but is offered as a discussion that recognizes the simple fact that death is not situated within any particular discipline. Each field examines mortality on different levels, through a variety of approaches and methodologies. When taken together, Becker, TMT, Ariès, Heidegger, and Nietzsche are able to say much more about our death, my death, than if they remained isolated in their own disciplinary perspectives. As a result, this work takes an interdisciplinary approach to flesh out these preliminary theses about death in life.

Chapter One: Phillipe Ariès, Historian: Modern Problem of Death

I. Introduction to Ariès

Philippe Ariès (1914-1984) examined the historical transformation of the concept of death in the Western world in the last few millennia. He breaks the perspectives down into four major periods with their own fairly distinct conceptualizations of our mortality. The first three periods Ariès delineates span from over a millennium ago through the nineteenth century, and he describes them as fundamentally similar. Ariès says that the concept of death "resisted the pressures of evolution for about two thousand years. In a world subject to change, the traditional attitude toward death is like a bulwark of inertia and continuity" (*HOD* 28). While there was some transformation across these first three periods, it occurred slowly over hundreds of years until contemporary times when "a complete reversal of customs seems to have occurred in one generation" (*HOD* 560). The previous ways we have conceptualized our perishing have been "so obliterated from our culture that it is hard for us to imagine or understand" (*HOD* 28). Since the 20th century, we perceive death as terrifying and wild, a phenomenon that should be rejected and banished from thought. Even though we feel our responses are natural and could not be different, they have been so throughout recorded history. In order to understand the distinctly modern way of dealing with death, this chapter unpacks the general differences between how we have previously conceived of death and how we approach it now.

II. Previous Conceptions of Death

Ariès began his historical investigation in the early Middle Ages, and titles this first period "tame death" (*HOD* 5). Although people did not want to die nor were they apathetic towards their demise, during this period death was familiar and accepted as a part of life. In this way, people did not reject and rebel against the fact that they and their loved ones would eventually die. Ariès references Alexander Solzhenitsyn who describes, "'they didn't puff themselves up or fight against it and brag that they weren't going to die- they took death *calmly*'" (qtd. in *WA* 13). Similarly, Ariès illustrates, "Naturally, the dying man feels sad about the loss of his life, the things he has possessed, and the people he has loved. But his regret never goes beyond a level of intensity that is very slight" (*HOD* 15). Death was anticipated and considered a part of life that one should come to terms with. People of this era wanted forewarning so they could make the necessary ritualistic preparations themselves. As a result, a sudden death was considered disgusting, ugly, and terrifying, which is quite different today when a sudden death often seems sensational (*HOD* 11). Considering it was typical to have foreknowledge of one's death, dying in bed was commonplace. The transition of dying also often took place publically. Children were expected to be a part of the rituals, and sometimes strangers would even come to the bedside (*WA* 12).

Ariès defines "One's own death" as the second period spanning the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, from the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries (*WA* 26). Just as in the first period, death was a generally accepted fact, forewarning was thought to be normal, dying took place at home, and the dying person orchestrated the rituals of their passing. Ariès states, the "man of the late Middle Ages [in the second period] was very acutely conscious that he had merely been granted a stay of execution, that this delay would be a

brief one, and that death was always present within him" (*WA* 44). As such, this perspective was not drastically different from the first period.

However, there were some distinct modifications in the second period, especially an increased concern over the personal and particular meaning of one's own life and death. People came to believe that what they did during their lives would eventually be judged and would impact their afterlife. As a result, the biography of each individual became important. In the moments before death, people began to see their lives flash before their eyes. They started to care about how they felt on their deathbed because they thought that this feeling would give their lives its "final meaning, its conclusion" (*WA* 38). As such, people came to think it was through death that they would come to understand who they were as individuals. Ariès maintains, "Death became the occasion when man was most able to reach an awareness of himself" (*WA* 46). Said differently, "In the mirror of his own death each man would discover the secret of his individuality" (*WA* 51). Therefore, while death was not sought after, death in this second period did seem to have a positive affect on how people viewed their time on earth. Ariès describes that people had a profound gratitude and love for their short existence, so much so that he asserts this perspective would be incredibly difficult for us to grasp today (*WA* 45). During this second period people accepted the eventuality of their death, and this increased the valuation of life and altered how one conducted their day-to-day existence.

The third period Ariès titles "Thy death," occurring from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries (*WA* 54). It was during this phase that the conceptualization of death started to drastically change. Instead of revolving around one's own individual death, from this point forward, death came to be defined through the death of the Other (*WA* 68). At

this time people began to reject the separation that occurred when someone died, so they began to form relationships with the dead. Previously remains were buried in common graves, but in this period the deceased began to be laid to rest in places where they could easily be visited, such as in the family backyard or in cemeteries (*WA* 70). Ariès proposes the main reason behind the rise in the prevalence of tombs was not the spread of Christianity, but because of "the survivors' unwillingness to accept the departure of their loved one" (*WA* 70). Furthermore, death became romanticized, dramatized, and much more emotionally charged. Therefore, while people partook in rituals similar to the previous periods, the rituals now became reinvigorated with meaning and seemed as if they had been newly created. In contrast to the simple and direct response to death of the first and second period, the third period involved an excess of emotion, which sometimes led to hysterical mourning on the brink of madness (*WA* 67).

Both the increased importance for loved ones to visit remains and the increased emotional reactions of the loved ones contribute to the third period's distinct focus on how the survivors experienced death. That is, at this time the conception of death was removed from the dying's hands and transferred to the hands of those left behind. Through this process, the dying lost the agency they once had over the rituals of their own death. People in this third period began to lose trust that their relatives would do as they, the dying, wished, and so people began to write wills in order to try to maintain some determination over the rituals of their passing. As the perspective of death moved its locus from the individuals to the loved ones, death became an abstract concept. Removed from the actual experience of dying, mortality came to have symbolic meaning, and the mere thought of death moved people (*WA* 60). In the third period death ceased to be a neutrally accepted

part of existence, and instead came to be seen as an adverse tearing, breaking, and rupturing of daily life.

III. The Modern Conception of Death

Beginning in the 20th century and continuing to this day, the fourth period Ariès defines involves the belief that death is forbidden and wild (*WA* 84). As previously explained, in the third period, death was taken out of the hands of the dying and placed under the power of the survivors. In the fourth period, death was further removed from the person experiencing it and placed under the supervision of society. Furthermore, under this societal management, death was implicitly effaced and kept silent in order to maintain the comfort of society at large. Ariès states that in modern times,

> [O]ne must avoid—no longer for the sake of the dying person, but for society's sake, for the sake of those close to the dying person—the disturbance and the overly strong and unbearable emotion caused by the ugliness of dying and by the very presence of death in the midst of a happy life, for it is henceforth given that life is always happy or should always seem to be so. (*WA* 87)

Ariès proposes that happiness is the supreme value of contemporary society, and every individual is expected to try to protect and contribute to this collective happiness. He describes that modern people are supposed to "[appear] to be always happy, even in the depths of despair" (*WA* 94). Therefore, the distress, pain, loss, and mourning involved in the dying process are now hushed up and covered over in order to try to maintain a semblance of perfect, pleasant happiness.

In conjunction with happiness, Ariès points out that contemporary society also highly values cleanliness. He illustrates, "Rapid advances in comfort, privacy, personal hygiene, and ideas about asepsis have made everyone more delicate. Our senses can no longer tolerate the sights and smells that in the early nineteenth century were part of daily life" (*HOD* 570). We feel physically sickened and repulsed by death, which is now experienced as foul and dirty. Ariès says, "Access to [the room of the dying] must be forbidden, except to a few intimates capable of overcoming their disgust" (*HOD* 569). As a result of this modern revulsion, starting in the 1930s the dying were placed in hospitals in order to both hide the unhappiness of dying and to manage its uncleanliness. The trained hospital personnel have become the only people who are capable of dealing with the ugliness of the biological process of dying. Death has become sanitized, technical, and medicalized.

Given that death in the modern, fourth period occurs in the hospital, it is not as typical as it was in previous times for entire families to be at the deathbed. In addition, ceremonies are kept to a minimum and are expected to be discreet and avoid emotion. People do their best to make it seem as if nothing has happened and no one has died (*WA* 90). An industry of professionals now has the responsibility to deal with the aftermath of a death, so that in the weeks following the perishing of a loved one, the family can go about their daily lives without interruption or much acknowledgement that death has occurred (*HOD* 571). Françoise Dastur, a contemporary scholar of phenomenology and existential philosophy, reaffirms Ariès perspective and explains that instead of providing psychological relief through social demonstration, funerals have become a tool for neutralizing death (9). Dastur adds that society also "[orders] the grieving to 'do' their

mourning" (10). If necessary, "experts" help mourners "cope" as quickly and painlessly as possible, which assists in maintaining the public semblance that there has not been a death. Modern death is purposefully forgotten, removed from everyday life, hidden away in sanitized hospitals, often takes place alone, and intentionally does not involve many emotions and rituals. This modern conceptualization of death as forbidden is almost a complete reversal of previous perspectives where death was a visible part of life, took place at home surrounded by family, and involved emotions as a necessary aspect of the ritualistic process.

Another major change in the modern view of death is that people no longer want to see or feel death coming. Ariès explains, "What today we call the good death, the beautiful death, corresponds exactly to what used to be the accursed death […] the death that gives no warning. 'He died tonight in his sleep: He just didn't wake up. It was the best possible way to die'" (*HOD* 587). Furthermore, Ariès points out that it is now the norm to sedate the dying with drugs, so they will not be conscious of their approaching death. This induced tranquilization also serves to dull the pains and cries of the dying to help conceal the fatal reality for the loved ones. Additionally, people try to convince the dying that they are not actually dying.[1] Ariès describes that the "dying [have come] to be treated like someone recovering from a major surgery" (*HOD* 584). Loved ones persuade the dying that if they fight hard enough, they will be healthy again; they reassure them that they are going to be just fine and everything will go back to how it was before. In our current period, Ariès proposes that people do not want foreknowledge of death, do not want to be sober and awake as they die, and do not want to believe and admit they will die.

Ariès points out two primary examples of the contemporary Western rejection of death, with the popularity of cremation in Europe and the widespread use of embalming in America. At least since the middle of the 20th century, cremation has become commonplace in Europe. Ariès rationalizes the incineration of the dead body gives people a way out of experiencing and logistically dealing with the physicality of death (*HOD* 576). Furthermore, cremation enables families to separate themselves from death because there are no remains that could be visited, thus freeing those left behind of post-funeral obligations to the deceased (*HOD* 576). While it appears that destroying the body in cremation is opposite to preserving the body through embalming, Ariès sees both of these processes as a rejection of death. Beginning in the early 20th century, embalming and holding wakes have risen to prevalence in America, practices that are rare in modern Europe (*WA* 98). Ariès suggests preserving and viewing the dead allows Americans to deny death before and during the funeral process because they can pretend the dead are still partially alive (*WA* 102). He states, "embalming serves less to preserve or honor the dead than it does temporarily to maintain the appearance of life in order to protect the living" (*HOD* 600). While there are other different ways in which Europeans and Americans ritualistically handle the dead body, Ariès highlights the prominence of cremation in Europe and embalming in America to show that the motivation behind these typical modern Western practices is a severe denial of death.

Our societal management of keeping death happy, clean, non-disruptive, sedated, masked, and unburdening all point to our present perspective of death as a problem instead of a condition. Ariès explains, "Death has ceased to be accepted as a natural, necessary phenomenon. Death is a failure […] an accident, a sign of helplessness or

clumsiness that must be put out of mind" (*HOD* 586). In a similar way, Dastur argues that death and sickness have become defined as 'objective' processes that happen *to* a person instead of as a fundamental aspect of human existence (11). Within the last few hundred years, death has transformed from an accepted fact of life to something we feel can be fixed and prevented, something that will not actually happen to us. Ariès describes that even though we admit that it is possible that we will die, we actually feel that we are non-mortals (*WA* 106). Moreover, Ariès asserts that this modern denial of death and belief in our immortality has become "a significant trait of our culture" (*HOD* 580). In our contemporary world, there exists a pervasive severe denial of all things relating to death, a death that has become wild, forbidden, and harmful to life.

IV. Modern Denial of Death as Problematic

Furthermore, Ariès believes this modern opinion of death as problematic is itself dangerous. He asserts that while we ceaselessly cling to our denial of death as if it is the key to preserving and promoting life, in actuality, "Our life is not as a result gladdened!" (*WA* 106). Ariès explains that the way we conceptualize our death detrimentally affects how we perceive ourselves. In his adamant concern about the problems of our present formulation of death, Ariès goes beyond providing a fact-based historical account. Specifically, he claims that the modern denial of death is closely connected to "contemporary man's recoil from the desire to exist" (*WA* 107, also see *HOD* 602). Ariès also expresses worry over the lack of social codes, expected rituals, and processes of dealing with emotion in our modern silencing of anything related to death. We no longer have a way to proactively deal with the major transitions involved with dying, so we now have no way to psychologically handle

the mourning process, let alone a way to reconcile with the fact that we too will die. Ariès proposes the covering over of death leads to unhealthy repression and sometimes even violent emotional outbursts (*HOD* 579). Ariès finds support for his assertions about the dangers of the denial of death in psychologists who, he claims, have always spoken out against the denial of death as psychologically damaging and problematic (*HOD* 580). Ariès even postulates that our extreme denial is becoming so detrimental that it might lead to future social movements against our culture's current erasure of death (*HOD* 593). Through his detailed history of the concept of death, Ariès has illustrated that in our modern, Western world, death has become a severe taboo, and he, even as a historian, expresses deep concern about the sweeping implications of our denial.

In terms of this thesis, Ariès' historical investigation of death in the Western world begins a conversation about how death affects our life. Most importantly, Ariès reveals a major shift in our concept of death in our modern society. We now perceive of death as unspeakable and wild, a problem instead of a basic aspect of existence. While fleeing from death may feel to us as if it is a permanent trait of our humanity, Ariès shows through his decades of research that we have not always rejected our mortality as we do now. In this way, Ariès exposes that perhaps our modern formulation could be changed. Indeed, Ariès even goes so far to say that our current denial of death is detrimental to how we deal with mourning, confront our mortality, conceive of ourselves, and live our lives.

Chapter Two: Ernest Becker, Interdisciplinary Anthropologist: Denial of our Death

I. Introduction to Becker

Anthropologist Ernest Becker (1924-1974) is another academic who has focused on how our dealings with death greatly affect our lives. In 1973 Ernest Becker won the Pulitzer Prize for his book *The Denial of Death* in which, as the title suggests, he argues the most fundamental human motivation is a rejection of our mortality. Becker believes that our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and beliefs, both individually and culturally, are the result of our innate fleeing from our weak impermanent bodies and ultimate perishing. While Ariès highlights that our rejection of death is a fairly modern reaction, Becker makes a much broader claim that this fleeing from death is a constitution of the human condition. Despite this major difference, both of these thinkers are, at the most fundamental level, trying to expose the danger of denying death, whether it is an aspect of who we are today or who we are as a human species.

Becker describes his work as an attempted synthesis of various areas of modern research in the social sciences. In his work he references a multitude of different types of thinkers and he himself approaches the topic of our mortality through a variety of disciplines. In particular, this thesis will look at how Becker uses the perspectives of developmental psychology, anthropology, abnormal psychology, personality psychology, social psychology, religion, and philosophy in his attempt to understand our denial of death. Becker's interdisciplinary perspective was in opposition to the hyper-specialization Becker saw growing in academia in the 1960s and 70s. Becker aimed to get "some kind of grip on the accumulation of thought [so] we [will not] continue to wallow helplessly, to starve amidst plenty" (*EE* xix). Becker knew he was taking a big risk in postulating such a

large theory, but instead of presenting clean data and discovering immaculately objective scientific facts, Becker wanted to try to get more of a grasp on the question of who we are as human beings and what we can and should do about it.

Because Becker is making broad declarations about humanity at large, he has not been the most accepted and praised thinker. There are many academics who criticize Becker for being irrelevant, un-scientific, or too negative. Becker himself was aware of the potential criticism that his bold and wide-ranging claims would provoke. In an introduction to one of his books he even confesses, "I have reached far beyond my competence" (*EE* xix). While it is problematic to make an over-arching claim regarding human nature, Becker's basic ideas challenge and lead credence to Ariès' conceptualization of our denial of death.

Despite the debatable aspects of his theory, Becker's work has made an impact in many fields. Daniel Liechty suggests that while Becker is not the first to postulate the theory of Generative Death Anxiety, he is the primary theorist who has elucidated and pushed this theory forward (xi). Liechty describes, "In every field of the humanities and social sciences, there are those who have been influenced by Becker's ideas" (xi). Indeed, an Ernest Becker Foundation was founded in 1993, which is still actively discussing Becker's ideas and influences (see ernestbecker.org). Therefore, even though Becker has been completely dismissed by many academics, many others have fallen so in love with his ideas that they have placed them at the center of their own life's work. This chapter describes the basics of Becker's theory in order to examine what about his work resonates across the disciplines in an attempt to shed further light on how death affects life.

II. Denial of Death

A. Existential Tension

The basis of Becker's theory, like the theories of many other thinkers before him, is the belief that humans are creatures fundamentally in tension. However, Becker's theory is distinctive in the claim that this tension stems from our mortality. He points out that humans have an extraordinary brain, which enables them to be conscious of the fact they will someday die. As far as we know, this awareness of our death sets humans apart from other animals. Becker postulates that our foreknowledge provides us with an evolutionary advantageous fear of dying that enables us to better avoid life-threatening situations. Yet, at the same time, the brain also has the capacity to limit the overwhelming aspect of the awareness of death. In other words, just as there is adaptive value in having anxiety of our mortality, Becker asserts this anxiety must also be kept under enough control for us to go about our daily lives (*BDM* 42). He explains, "[T]he fear of death must be present behind all our normal functioning, in order for the organism to be armed toward self-preservation. But the fear of death cannot be present constantly in one's mental functioning, else the organism could not function" (*DD* 16). Coming primarily from the discipline of anthropology, the foundation of Becker's theory proposes that in order to continue propagating the species, humans have biologically evolved into animals fundamentally in tension: we must both uncover that we will die and must also cover the fact we will die.

Another way Becker illustrates our existential tension is by describing humans as "gods with anuses" (*DD* 51). Regardless of who we are or what we do in our lives, we must all defecate. Becker suggests that, as a result, our anus proves to each of us that we have limited control over ourselves. Every day when we excrete our waste, we confront the fact that we are bound to a finite animal body (*DD* 31). Yet, Becker argues that we also have a

perceived sense of godliness. He claims that we feel we are distinct from and superior to other animals, that we are not mere mortal defecating creatures. In this way, Becker sees our existential tension as this push and pull between our actual creatureliness and assumed godliness. He states, "The tragedy of evolution is that it created a limited animal with unlimited horizons" (*EE* 153). Becker believes we are trying to constantly reconcile the desire to heighten our sense of immortal specialness with the confining demands of our animal condition, and that this helps us to necessarily deny our death.

B. Developmental Psychology: Socialization

Yet, how do we deal with our existential tension? How do we reconcile the fact that we are constrained to our body? How do we limit the overwhelming foreknowledge of our mortality? In short, how do we deny our death? Becker understands the answer to this question as an adoption of a particular culture through socialization.

Socialization is the process whereby a person comes to be accepted as an adult in society, which, according to Becker, occurs when a child gives up their bodily freedom and adopts the symbolic system of their culture (*BDM* 52). Becker explains, "[The baby's] ego develops by learning to regulate [their] own food intake and feces evacuation: [they have] to learn to adapt to a social schedule, to an external measure of time, in place of a biological schedule of internal urges" (*BDM* 40). Once a person pushes down and limits their animality, they can become a part of the cultural immortality. Becker says, "If [they are] to expand and grow in such a world [they have] to replace [their] own authentic movement with a fictional framework of value" (*BDM* 61), and, as such, "[practice] self-deceit" (*DD* 46). An adult is someone, according to Becker, who tries to free themselves from their

overwhelming foreknowledge of death by imprisoning themselves within a cultural system that helps to cover over their awareness.

Because the socialization process involves deceiving oneself, Becker explains "the *humanization process itself is* […] *neurosis*: the limitation of experience, the fragmentation of perception, the dispossession of *genuine* internal control" (*BDM* 56). In this way, Becker sees socialization as a process of becoming mad, of accepting the "shared madness" of one's culture (*DD* 27). On top of the neurotic adoption of a cultural system to deny our death, Becker points out we are even more insane for still knowing we will die. In other words, Becker argues that we could all be considered crazy for feeling that we can overcome death and yet also know that we cannot. However, Becker views this madness as a requirement for life. He asserts the "essence of normality is the *refusal of reality*" (*DD* 178), and he describes the cultural system as a necessary fiction, "a vital lie" (*DD* 47).[2] While Becker gives credit to Freud for first proclaiming that neurosis and denial are normal, Becker proposes Freud was mistaken in thinking that neurosis and denial are caused by sexual instincts. Instead, Becker insists that what we consider healthy socialization is in fact a shared madness, for it is centrally a denial of death.

C. Anthropology: Culture

Essentially, Becker understands that culture facilitates our denial of death in that it heightens our feeling of immortality. A particular way that culture increases our assumed godliness is through an identity with an immortal being that lives beyond our physical bodies. Becker explains that culture provides "an antidote to terror by giving [its members] a new and durable life beyond that of the body" (*EE* 92). Culture acts as a transcendent

organism that we become a part and which continues to exist long after we as individuals die (*EE* 3). In this way, "Culture *means* that which is super*natural;* all culture has the basic mandate to transcend the physical, to permanently transcend it" (*EE* 64). Through culture, we come to believe that despite our bodily death, we will continue to live on in the immortality of our society.

In addition to this symbolic perpetuation after death, Becker asserts that culture also provides a more personal sense of immortality by enabling its members to feel that they are living on a godly, righteous, heroic path. Becker defines culture as "a symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules for behavior" (*DD* 4; also see *BDM* 78). In other words, culture creates a system of meaning that a person needs in order to act at all, to engage and navigate their world, and to know what and how to do anything. Most basically, Becker defines culture as a system of meaning that prescribes a right way to live, and in this way is a "codified hero system" (*DD* 7). Culture imbues its members with a sense of heroism, so they come to feel they are heroes fighting Evil and promoting Good. Being a hero exaggerates a person's feeling that they are immortal and godly, and provides them with a sense that their lives are meaningful and significant (*DD* 7). Furthermore, feeling like a hero allows people to view themselves as superior and more civilized than the rest of the animal kingdom, which enables them to distance themselves from their mortal animality (*DD* 159). In total, Becker proposes that the heroic path of culture enables people to deal with their existential tension by providing a way to deny one's death in an exaggeration of one's special, immortal, righteous, godliness and thus a repressing of one's meaningless, mortal, animality.

Beyond describing the cultural heroic system as the general way in which we deny our death, Becker illustrates that we fetishize specific cultural heroes in order to flee from the awareness of our death. Becker says, "Whatever idols [people remain] rooted to are idols designed precisely to hide the reality of the despair of [their] condition; all the frantic and obsessive activity of daily life, in whatever country, under whatever ideology, is a defense against full self-consciousness" (*BDM* 194). Becker clarifies that through transference, we place our perceived godliness onto a fetish object, so in our attachment to the fetishization, we can enhance our feeling that we are immortal, which in turn also helps us to repress our finite animality. For example, when a person fetishizes a charismatic political leader, they come view the politician as god-like. Then, in serving the goals of this god-like politician, people will feel that they too are on a cosmically righteous path. This connection to an entity they believe is like a god enhances their own sense of immortality. Furthermore, in promoting the political leader, they also come to believe that their god-like hero will be able to protect them from death, thus downplaying their animal mortality. In this way, having an idol or fetish denies death in a process similar to culture in general. Fetishizing specific cultural heroes exaggerates one's connection to the immortal cosmos, which allows a person to distance themselves from their creatureliness, thus assisting in the denial of their death (*DD* 155).

D. Abnormal Psychology: Mental Illness

As previously explained, Becker claims that we are all generally mad because we deny our death. Moreover, he also asserts that everyone will, at some point in their lives, experience a tear in the protective covering of their heroic cultural system and also

breakdown into personal mental instability. Becker explains that no matter what kind of cultural heroic system is adopted, everyone's form of a denial of death will eventually falter (*DD* 179). These moments of being overwhelmed and debilitated by the truths of existence are usually brief, and a person is often able to reinvigorate their old solution or find new ways to cope with their existential tension.

If a person cannot remedy his or her neurotic break quickly, then they risk becoming mentally ill. Becker sees abnormal psychology as "the failures of death transcendence" in that those who are mentally ill are "unable to exercise the 'normal cultural heroism'" (*DD* 248; see also *DD* 209). In other words, Becker understands mental illness as an inability to cover over the truth of existence, which is necessary to be fully integrated into a culture. It is important to realize that Becker does not think the lack or deficiency of a system to deny one's death is a conscious decision. Instead, he sees mental illness as an imbalance of one's existential tension, likely resulting from issues in childhood socialization (*DD* 182).

Depression is one example of a mental illness Becker explains that results from the absence of a way to deny one's death. This lack of denial in depression results because the depressed person is trying to deny their need for a denial. In attempt to limit the overwhelming aspects of their existence, they restrict their engagement with the world and thus are unable to adequately function. In short, the depressed person tries not to live, so they will not die.

In addition, Becker describes the mental illness of schizophrenia, which he also sees as involving a rejection of any form of death denial. Becker believes schizophrenics oftentimes reject a cultural heroic system because they do not consider themselves mortal humans

that require denial. Becker states, "The full-blown schizophrenic is abstract, ethereal, unreal; he billows out of the earthly categories of space and time, floats out of his body, dwells in an eternal now, is not subject to death and destruction" (*DD* 76). In the way that Becker understands depression as an excessive embracing of mortality and perceiving too much limitation, he believes schizophrenia is an excessive sense of immortality and perceiving too much freedom.

Therefore, Becker views both depression and schizophrenia as an inability to adequately reconcile existential tension. Said differently, Becker understands these mental illnesses as resulting from an incapacity to balance between a necessary sense of immortality and an acknowledgment of our mortality. In this way, Becker claims that mental illness is representative of an inadequate denial of death. Becker argues that the insufficient denial involved in depression and schizophrenia is problematic in that it disables a person from moving forward, growing, making choices and functioning in society (*DD* 179). However, Becker also claims that this lack of adequate death denial in mental illness means that people with mental illness are more honest about their mortal condition than people who adopt a healthier cultural heroic system. Becker agrees with Otto Rank that these psychological ailments are, "much nearer to the actual truth psychologically than the others and it is just that from which [they suffer]'" (qtd. in *DD* 176). Because they are too honest, either about their animal nature or their extraordinary god-like ability or both, Becker believes that people who suffer from mental illness are unable to navigate the complex need to both be aware of death and also deny it.

E. Personality Psychology: Personalities

Interestingly, Becker defines various types of personalities in a way that seems as if he sees them on a continuum with mental illness. He illustrates certain everyday kinds of people as acting similar to but milder versions of schizophrenia and depression. In this way, it seems Becker views personality as also fundamentally affected by the way in which people deny their death. As a result, Becker views that in addition to our socialization into a specific cultural heroic system in general (i.e. culture), we also individually interact with our cultural system (i.e. personality). He views both our cultural and personality identities as ways in which we navigate the complexity of knowing about our death and simultaneously covering over our awareness.

One way in which it seems Becker sees a continuum between personality and mental illness is his description of the "automatic cultural man" in a way that makes them sound like a person with less severe depression. Becker explains the "automatic cultural man" is a typical person who thoughtlessly adopts their culture's pre-made heroes. He states "people need a 'beyond,' but they reach first for the nearest one; this gives them the fulfillment they need but at the same time limits and enslaves them" (*DD* 169). In this way, Becker thinks people tend to automatically surrender to what their culture prescribes as the right way to live. He describes that the automatic cultural person keeps their heads down, does not ask questions, and robotically engages with their world (*DD* 73). Similar to a person with depression, this "normal" person is "[tranquilized] with the trivial" (*DD* 79). Furthermore, Becker understands that the automatic cultural man, also like a person with depression, limits life in order to flee from the terror of death (*DD* 81).[3] As a result, it seems that Becker understands depression as an extreme version of the automatic cultural man.

Considering the similarity, this might also mean the automatic cultural man might be more prone to slipping into depression if their cultural heroic system falters.

Another way it seems that Becker views personality as a milder version of mental illness is through his similar explanations of creative people and schizophrenics. In his description of cultural heroes, Becker titles our specific fetishizations as types of 'solutions' to our existential tension in that they limit the overwhelming knowledge of our death by providing us with the vital delusion we will not die. One primary 'solution' Becker delineates is the creative solution. The creative solution is defined by Becker as the rejection of any premade cultural heroic system and construction of one's own. Becker explains that a creative person is "separated out of the common pool of shared meanings. There is something in [their] life experience that makes [them] take in the world as a *problem*; as a result [they have] to make personal sense out of it" (*DD* 171). The way in which the creative person deals with their existential tension is by making themselves their fetishization. Because the creative solution involves being one's own hero, the creative individual burdens themself with the role of the immortal. That is, the creative person must construct a system that highlights their own assumed godliness in order to exaggerate their feeling of immortality so that they are able to deny their death.

The task of the creative solution is no easy feat, and even when it is accomplished, it is incredibly difficult to maintain. Becker states, the creative solution "takes a strength and courage the average man doesn't have and couldn't even understand" (*DD* 171). Considering how challenging it is, Becker asserts that the creative solution is the most uncommon and dangerous form of death denial. In particular, because it is so hard to

perpetuate the creative solution, the creative person is always at risk of falling into mental instability, perhaps even becoming schizophrenic.

As previously explained, Becker views schizophrenics as people who do not create forms of death denial because they do not think they require one. Even though the creative person does adopt another way to deal with their existential tension, they are similar to schizophrenics in that they feel capable enough to handle facing their life in their own way. Given that Becker describes both as involving agency over one's denial, it seems that Becker understands schizophrenia as a failed attempt at the creative solution. Therefore, in this way it also seems that if a creative person were ever to fail at constructing a new form of death denial, they could potentially fall into schizophrenia.

A different outcome of a malfunctioning creative solution seems to be what Becker calls the person of "demoniac rage" (*DD* 84). He explains a person of demoniac rage as someone who tries to both make themselves their own God and also reasserts the vitality of their animality. Their demoniac system does not fully work to deny death because the extremeness makes it nearly impossible to maintain the balanced tension between one's creatureliness and assumed godliness, thus putting them at a high risk of schizophrenia. A milder result of a failed creative solution appears to be what Becker titles the "introvert man" (*DD* 82). He describes the introvert person as someone who looks inwardly to try to deal with life and death with their own solution. Becker explains that teenagers often try this more authentic route, but because it is so hard to sustain, they eventually fall into the normal premade heroic system and become thoughtless automatic cultural people.

In short, Becker seems to understand different personality types as arising from the attempt to balance one's existential tension. Sometimes people heighten one's assumed

godliness and/or enhance one's mortal animality either too much or too little. Taking together his theory of mental illness and his perspective of personality, it seems that Becker sees a continuum from normal tendencies to severe mental illness, such as from common teenage transitions to schizophrenia or the typical automatic adopting of a premade cultural system to depression. A person will fall at any point along this continuum depending on the magnitude of their rejection/acceptance of a cultural heroic system and their ability/inability to construct an adequate new form of death denial. Becker states, "Once you accept the truly desperate situation that man is in, you come to see not only that neurosis is normal, but that even psychotic failure represents only a little additional push in the routine stumbling along life's way" (*DD* 269). Every form of death denial eventually falters, so each of us sometimes experiences existential turmoil. We often can remedy this break in our protective covering. However, if we are unable to construct or repair our form of death denial, then our personality might become more extreme or perhaps we will become more severely mental ill. In this way, Becker believes an adequate denial of death is necessary for psychological health.[4]

III. Protection of Death Denial

A. Opposing Others to Maintain our Death Denial

Considering the psychological importance of our death of denial, Becker also spends a great deal of his theorizing describing the necessity of bolstering and protecting our particular cultural heroic systems that help us to necessarily deny our death. If our system is threatened, then our vital sense of immortality is threatened. Becker explains, "No wonder [people] go into a rage over fine points of belief: if your adversary wins the

argument about truth, *you die.* Your immortality system has been shown to be fallible, your life becomes fallible" (*EE* 64). Consequently, in an attempt to continue fleeing from death, we aggress, evangelize, or annihilate any other ideology that goes against our own. We play the role of the hero, battling against all who threaten our cultural system. Becker asserts, "man's natural and inevitable urge to deny mortality and achieve a heroic self-image are the root causes of human evil" (*EE* xvii). In this way, Becker proposes that evil comes from an insecurity of our mortal vulnerability. Our heroic projects aimed at destroying 'evil', in the form of our creatureliness and death, have the paradoxical effect of bringing more 'evil' into the world, through the harming of others (*EE* 136).[5]

B. How we Protect our Denial of Death

As mentioned above, Becker believes we create a solution to our existential tension by constructing a transference fetish object, typically in the form of a God, a beloved, an authority, or ourselves. Although he does not clearly explain it, it seems Becker also believes we have another transference object. The previously explained idol fetish works positively to achieve death denial through connection to a God-like entity, which enables a feeling of immortality. However, this additional transference object works negatively to accomplish death denial by rejecting an animal-like Other, which enables a feeling that one is not mortal. Becker says, "It is precisely the split-off sense of inferiority and animality which is projected onto the scapegoat and then destroyed symbolically with him" (*EE* 95). We can distance ourselves from our terrifying demise by acting against our mortality in the form of the transference object Other. In this way, the Other becomes the fallible, creaturely mortal, and we become the righteous, immortal heroes. Becker says, "all those who join

together under one banner are alike and so qualify for the privilege of immortality; all those who are different and outside that banner are excluded from the blessings of eternity" (*EE* 113). In order to protect our cultural system, Becker argues that we must justify to ourselves that our system is the correct one. We come to think I am just and they are unjust, I know and they do not, I am right and they are wrong, I am good and they are evil. In this oppositional way, we come to push the Other down in order to raise ourselves up.

Oftentimes this spurn manifests through the view that the Other is "animalistic," "barbaric," and "uncivilized." Becker does not go into much detail about the mechanisms of constructing an Other, but contemporary social psychological research supplements his basic idea. In particular, social psychology proposes we especially reject Others through cognitive biases. For example, the *fundamental attribution error* is the tendency to attribute someone's behavior to permanent personality traits and underestimate the effects of situational factors.[6] Therefore, if a person behaves in a way we find immoral, then we likely believe these Others are essentially and permanently morally corrupt. We come to think that they are "evil," "terrorists," or "psychopaths." Then, according to Becker, in our opposition to this irrational, destructive Other, we feel that we are helping make the world more just, beautiful, and peaceful. Becker proposes that once we view the Other as the evil animal, then we can view ourselves as the righteous immortal in order to deny our death.

In addition, Becker states that having a clear-cut out-group strengthens the identity and bond of an in-group, which reassures and further solidifies our sense of immortality (*EE* 116). Again, while Becker does not describe the mechanism underlying this phenomenon, contemporary social psychology research helps to elucidate this process.

Cognitive dissonance is another cognitive bias defined by social psychology, and is the tendency for humans to reduce the discrepancy between how they act and what they believe.[7] More specifically, in order to reduce the cognitive tension of doing one thing and believing another, social psychology shows that we will alter what we believe in order to coincide with what we did. Becker and social psychology align together to suggest that when we oppose an evil Other, our identity with and our belief in the righteousness of our cultural heroic system is strengthened through cognitive dissonance, thus assisting us in the denial of our death.

Furthermore, Becker explains that going against an Other also distracts us from thinking about our terrifying death. Becker says, "by actively manipulating and hating we keep our organism absorbed in the outside world; this keeps self-reflection and the fear of death in a state of low tension" (*EE* 113).[8] If we focus on defining Others as animals, then it is easier for us to forget that we too are mortal animals. In sum, transferring our animality onto an Other that we can oppose enables us to distance ourselves from our mortal creatureliness, psychologically fortify our identity with our immortal in-group, and distract us from the terror of our inevitable perishing.

C. Necessary Protection of our Denial of Death

Given that an Other transference object is one part of necessarily covering over our death, Becker believes we cannot stop from creating harm. He says, "Life cannot go on without the mutual devouring of organisms" (*EE* 2). In other words, Becker claims that in order to survive we must nullify, or "devour," the identity of Others. This opposition to Others feeds our need for righteousness and self-esteem, which we need to necessarily

deny our mortality. Becker understands this symbolic food to be just as necessary for survival as material food, suggesting our opposition to Others is physiologically motivated, and thus is fundamentally part of being human (*EE* 144).

Therefore, even if a person made the central tenet of their cultural heroic system to not harm others, they would still not be able to escape the need for defending their vital denial of death. This value of not harming others and accepting all cultural systems would be another form of a cultural heroic system that one sets out to bolster and protect. Becker explains, "One culture is always a potential menace to another because it is a living example that life can go on heroically within a value framework totally alien to one's own" (*BDM* 140). Our denial and the protection of that denial are not escapable, incorrect, or immoral, but are rather a part of who we are as humans. Becker argues, "[We] must at all times *defend the utter fragility of [our] delicately constituted fiction, deny its artificiality,*" and, indeed, "this is how *this* animal must act if [it] is to function as *this* animal" (*BDM* 139). According to Becker, in order to be psychologically healthy humans, and to physically survive, everyone is required to fortify their systems of denying death.

IV. Limitations of Becker's Theory in his Promotion of Religion

A. Hierarchy of Different Forms of Death Denial

Even though Becker proposes that we all need to deny our death and protect our particular form of death denial, he argues not all of the ways in which we do so are equal in value. In other words, Becker asserts that there is a hierarchy of cultural heroic systems. However, Becker himself and we, his readers, are situated within our own particular cultural heroic systems, which makes it incredibly challenging to validly claim that one

form of death denial is better than another. Nevertheless, throughout his work Becker adamantly promotes the religious solution as the best way to deny our death.

B. Reduction of Harm

Becker claims that we can evaluate forms of death denial through an empirical ranking. Essentially, he argues that even though all our forms of death denial require opposition to others, there are varying degrees of harming others. He says, "These costs can be tallied roughly in two ways: in terms of the tyranny practiced within the society, and in terms of the victimage practiced against aliens or 'enemies' outside it" (*EE* 125). According to Becker, the least harmful and thus best cultural heroic system is religion, or a fetish transference object of a God.

Perhaps different forms of death denial can indeed be ranked according to the harm they cause, but Becker does not explain how religion reduces opposition to others, let alone why it is the most peaceful cultural heroic system. It is possible Becker thinks religion deals with our existential tension so well that worshippers will have less of a need to bolster their system and, thus, will oppose others less. However, if he does understand religion as such, Becker leaves it unsaid and invalidated. Not to mention a brief consideration of the death and destruction caused by religious wars throughout history and up to the present day would tend to argue against such a claim that religion promotes peace between different peoples.

Becker also claims that a form of death denial could be constructed that results in the opposition of 'evil' ideas instead of harming other people. Becker argues the enemy Other transference object,

> [N]eed not be any special class or race or even human enemy, but could be things that take impersonal but real forms, like poverty, disease, oppression, natural disasters, etc. Or, if we know that evil takes human form in oppressors and hangmen, then we could at least try to make our hatreds of men intelligent and informed: we could work against the enemies of freedom. (EE 145)

It is possible that Becker understands religion as the least harmful system in that it involves this mechanism of opposing impersonal forms. However, Becker does not directly describe religion as working in this manner, and even if he did, Becker does not provide any validation to support this proposition. In addition, Becker contradicts himself because, as previously explained, he also argues no one can stop from harming other people (BDM 139). Furthermore, Becker is lobbing out debatable concepts such as 'poverty' and 'oppression' without beginning to clarify what he means, and the definitions of these terms are not self-evident. In total, Becker claims religion as superior because he understands it to be the least harmful system, but he does not offer any adequate explanation of how religion accomplishes this reduction of harm.

C. Cannot Construct Our Own Heroic System

Becker also views religion as superior because he believes that humans cannot truly supply an adequate heroic system on their own. He finds confirmation in the works of Rank, Augustine, and Kierkegaard who also think, "[humans] cannot fashion an absolute from within [their] condition, that cosmic heroism must transcend human relationships" (*DD* 169; see also *DD* 203). Becker rationalizes that all other transference objects are human, so they have their own agendas and needs, and will therefore eventually fail at

maintaining their God-like facade. He says, "No human relationship can bear the burden of godhood and the attempt has to take its toll in some way on both parties" (*DD* 166). When the human transference object is exposed as a cosmic fraud and loses their immortal power, then their worshipper cannot connect to and exaggerate their own godliness that is required to deny death. Furthermore, Becker believes that God "does not limit our development by His own personal will and needs" (*DD* 166). In other words, because He is a non-physical entity, God can be whatever we need Him to be. Becker claims having a God as a transference fetish object assures that one will always be able to maintain a necessary connection with the immortal. Therefore, because God transcends human relations, Becker understands religion as being the most consistent and strongest solution.

Considering that this argument rests on the assumption that the religious solution does in fact transcend human relationships, it logically requires the existence of God. In other words, it is not possible to understand religion as superior in this way if God is a human construct. Consequently, Becker is making a massive assumption that God does exist in order to argue that through His transcendence, we can best maintain our denial of death.

D. Animality but Transcendence

In addition to promoting the religious solution, Becker also encourages his readers in their flight from death to not reject their animality in attempt to feel wholly immortal. Becker believes that we should never lose sight of the fact that we are animals, and he asserts we should accept our weakness and mortality as a source of energy and growth. Becker states,

> [W]hatever man does on this planet [should] be done in the lived truth of the terror of creation, of the grotesque, of the rumble of panic underneath everything. Otherwise it is false. Whatever is achieved must be achieved from within the subjective energies of creatures, without deadening, with the full exercise of passion, of vision, of pain, of fear, and of sorrow. (*DD* 284)

Similarly, Becker suggests, "behind it all would be the same *type* of evolutionary creature" (*DD* 277). Becker does not want us to completely demolish our humanity to metamorphose into something entirely transcendent. Rather, he promotes a utilization of what we are, that we face our existential tension, which includes our mortal animality. Furthermore, Becker supports someone who "takes more of the world into himself and develops new forms of courage and endurance" (*DD* 279). It is not enough that we embrace ourselves as creatures, Becker also wants us to sustain this perspective.

Therefore, another reason why Becker promotes the religious solution over all other forms of death denial is because he believes it does not involve a complete rejection of one's animality (*DD* 160). Religion, according to Becker, provides "Faith that one's very creatureliness has some meaning to a Creator; that despite one's true insignificance, weakness, death, one's existence has meaning" (*DD* 90). Becker argues that in Christianity, one's mortal creatureliness is actually the condition for cosmic heroism (*DD* 160). Becker advocates religion that embraces our weak, mortal bodies as the requisite for connecting to an immortal God, thus enabling believers to embrace themselves as creatures in existential tension.

Unfortunately, Becker seems to undermine his own clarity because in addition to proposing an acceptance of animality, Becker also suggests that the religious solution

involves self-transcendence. Becker references Kierkegaard who believes "The 'healthy' person, the true individual, the self-realized soul, the 'real' [human], is the one who has *transcended* [themselves]" (*DD* 86). His proposition that one should go beyond themselves seems to be in direct contradiction to Becker's earlier statement that one should remain the creatures they are and not try to metamorphosis into a new type of entity. However, it is possible that by 'transcending' Becker is suggesting we remain the creaturely humans we are, but experience growth beyond our typical unawareness about how the denial of death affects our lives. This idea is supported when Becker describes a person transcends themselves by "realizing the truth of [their] situation, by dispelling the lie of [their] character, by breaking [their] spirit out of its conditioned prison" (*DD* 86). Even if Becker is only promoting improvement, by using the word 'transcendence' he is communicating more of an idea of complete transformation. Given the complicated nature of the word 'transcendence,' using it as a key word without clear definition could easily lead to misinterpretation and confusion by Becker's readers, especially regarding how transcendence is reconciled with an embracing of one's animality.

E. Not Traditional Institutionalized Religion

Beyond the complicated details of how religion can involve both an embracing of our creatureliness and also a transcending beyond our humanity, Becker's readers are still left with the question of what he exactly means by religion. Becker describes institutionalized religion often falls into the trap of being "automatic, reflexive, obsessive" and in many cases promotes the vicious harming of others (*BDM* 197). In this way, it seems that Becker is not promoting traditional institutionalized religion, although he never

defines his conception directly in contrast to this typical understanding of religion. Furthermore, there is never a point in any of Becker's books where he straightforwardly defines his idea of religion. Given that Becker fails to adequately elucidate what he means by religion, his readers must weed through confusing hints and ultimately guess about what Becker is proposing we should do to best cope with the overwhelming fear of our inevitable perishing.

F. Superior in Openness and Critical Thinking

While Becker may not give a direct definition of religion, he nevertheless does describe religion as involving openness. Becker illustrates the religious person as the Kierkegaardian knight of faith who "represents what we might call an ideal of mental health, the continuing openness of life out of the death throes of dread" (*DD* 258). Becker encourages his readers to "continually broaden and expand [their] horizons, allegiances, the quality of [their] preoccupations" (*BDM* 191). He asserts that maintaining openness is particularly challenging, and claims "[t]he most one can achieve is a certain relaxedness, an openness to experience that makes him less of a driven burden on others" (*DD* 259). Moreover, Becker makes the bold claim that "religion alone gives us hope, because it holds open the dimension of the unknown" (*DD* 203). It seems Becker valorizes a religion that promotes maintaining strength to hold oneself open towards what one is not, does not grasp, and cannot control in life and death.

Alongside his advocacy of religion, Becker seems to sometimes indirectly praise critical thinking, perhaps suggesting a connection between his understanding of religion and critical thought. For example, as previously explained, Becker views the

thoughtlessness of the automatic cultural person as a harmful way to deny death. In this way, Becker might favor the opposite of thoughtlessness, as in critical thinking. Similarly, Becker views blindness as the fundamental reason for evil in the world (*EE* 136). Becker also argues that the more we become conscious of our mortal condition, the better we will deal with our denial and the less we will harm others (*EE* 90). In these ways, it is possible that Becker believes religion involves critically thinking about our need to deny death.

Even though Becker provides his readers with some explanation of religion through his promotion of openness and critical thinking, he does not elucidate how religion involves these qualities. It is left unsaid how Becker thinks religion is better than philosophy and science at encouraging openness and critical thinking, disciplines typically considered to excel at these processes. As such, Becker treads on dangerous waters in his unsupported claim that religion, more than any other approach, leads to openness and critical thinking.

G. Leap of Faith but Not Mystical

Another positive description of Becker's idea of religion is that it involves a leap of faith. Specifically, Becker praises the Kierkegaardian knight of faith who has "given over the meaning of [their] life to [their] Creator" in a leap of faith (*DD* 257). However, Becker uses the phrase "leap of faith" without any explanation. In attempt to squeeze any meaning out of what Becker might be advocating, when examined in conjunction with other aspects of what he says, the idea of "leap of faith" becomes even more muddled. In particular, Becker seems to be opposed to a mystic union with God. He says a person would not be able to function in this world if they "[gave] in completely to the thrill of the miraculous" (*BDM* 143). However, it is unclear what the difference is between Becker's praised leap of faith

through giving oneself over to God and his rejected mystical giving oneself over to the miraculous. The reader is left to guess at what exactly Becker proposes as the right way to courageously bind with God. Becker's promotion of a leap and rejection of unification is further hard to grasp because he also praises primitive religion. Becker explains primitive religion as having an exceptional ability to imbue every aspect of one's life with cosmic heroism through an immense number of rituals, the celebration of magic, and the belief in an invisible realm (*EE* 15). Becker says, "those who lived in primitive and traditional society could achieve even in the smallest daily tasks that sense of cosmic heroism that is the highest ambition of man" (*DD* 124). Perhaps Becker sees a stark contrast between primitive religion and mystic unification. Or maybe his celebration of primitive religion is only meant to emphasize the importance of rituals to best connect one to the transcendent. Regardless, Becker's lack of explanation leaves the reader unable to clarify how a religious connecting to God in a bold, intense leap of faith does *not* mean completely mystically unifying with Him but likely *does* have similarities to primitive religion.

H. Creative and Superior to Creative Solution

An additional way Becker indirectly defines his religious solution is through a rejection of the creative solution. As previously explained, the creative solution involves constructing one's own heroic system to deny death. While Becker initially described the creative solution as a valid but risky possibility (see *DD* 171), elsewhere he seems to be adamantly against it as a healthy option for anyone. For example, he claims, "one cannot generate a self-created hero system unless he is mad" (*EE* 157). At other times Becker seems to be arguing that it is not even possible for an individual to construct their own way

to deal with death, suggesting one cannot adopt a truly creative solution (*DD* 162). Becker's ideas might not be contradictory if he believes the creative solution is indeed attainable, but only through the guiding help of a God. This alternative is supported through Becker's agreement with Rank that "even the highest, most individuated creative type can only manage autonomy to some extent" (*EE* 161). Nevertheless, if Becker is proposing that the creative solution involves the hand of God, this exposes that Becker's personal heroic system is likely influencing his evaluations of different forms of death denial. Perhaps Becker sees his own heroic system as the basis of all other heroic systems in order to bolster his beliefs to assist his personal need for a denial of death. If he has other reasons why there cannot be a truly creative solution, Becker does not elucidate them.

Becker's stance towards the creative solution is further complicated because he also sees creativity as an essential aspect of the religious solution. For example he says, "The *creative* person becomes, then, in art, literature, and *religion* the mediator of natural terror and the indicator of a new way to triumph over it. He reveals the darkness and the dread of the human condition and fabricates a new symbolic transcendence over it [italics added]" (*DD* 220). Similarly Becker explains the knight of faith of the religious solution is "like all ideals [in that] it is a *creative* illusion, meant to lead men on, and leading men on is not the easiest thing [italics added]" (*DD* 258). Both of these quotes suggest that Becker understands the religious solution as a creative process. Furthermore, Becker perceives his own task as an interdisciplinary anthropologist as a creative construction of a new heroic system. He states, "the task of social theory is not to explain guilt [or existential tension] away or to absorb it unthinkingly in still another destructive ideology, but to neutralize it and give it expression in truly *creative* and life-enhancing ideologies [italics added]" (*EE*

162). In all of these ways it seems that Becker sees creativity and religion as fundamentally intertwined. However, it is left unclear why Becker does not promote the creative solution alongside the religious solution or why he does not directly explain the religious solution as a creative process.

If Becker is speaking to a particular audience, it could explain why he verbally defines the religious solution as superior to the creative solution, but also indirectly describes them as interconnected. Perhaps Becker is catering his message to the masses because he does not believe most people are strong enough to handle the risk involved in constructing their own creative solution. Instead, he could be directly promoting religion because he wants to steer the majority of people towards a safer route. This idea is supported when Becker explains the highest form of a creative person as a genius who "has the resources of a strong ego, or at least a sufficient one, to give [their] own personal meanings a creative form" (*DD* 221). In other words, it seems that Becker believes it takes a very rare and particular type of person to participate in the creative solution in a healthy manner. In this way, perhaps Becker understands certain people as able to bypass religion to accomplish creativity, while the masses can only embrace creativity through religion. Nevertheless, this hypothesis is a shot in the dark. Becker provides certain descriptions to hint that there is a connection between the creative and religious solutions, but he does not communicate the relation and why he believes it to be such.[9]

I. Inadequate Definition of Religious Solution

All of these issues with Becker's promotion of the religious solution thus far described stem from his lack of direct and clear definition of his concept of religion. Even

when Becker does provide partial explanation, he seems to completely contradict himself elsewhere in his work. Because Becker does not provide an adequate, comprehensive elucidation of the religious solution he so adamantly promotes, his readers are unable to apprehend the alleged benefits of this form of death denial.[10]

J. Unaware of Influence from Personal Beliefs

Beyond the issues with his promotion of the religious solution, within the description of his theory more generally, Becker also seems unaware his conceptions are affected by his personal beliefs. In his explanations, it is obvious that Becker comes from a Western, male, heterosexual, white, democratic, Christian perspective. In particular, Becker takes many of his foundational ideas for granted such as his dualistic perspectives of body versus mind, internal versus external, and visible versus invisible. In a similar way, he often uses misleading and loaded words such as "transcendent," "evil," "fiction," "lie," "real," and "faith." While a person may not be able to step outside of a particular cultural heroic system, Becker seems to quickly and easily give up the attempt to think critically about what may be influencing his ideas. Becker challenges us to question our own perspectives, but he himself does not ever reference his own cultural heroic system and how it could be affecting his theory and the way he presents it.

K. Unanswered Question of What to Do about Our Denial of Death

Although Becker should be regarded for trying to push science in order to say something about our mortal condition, the lack of carefulness in his propositions is dangerous to his readers. Because he is promoting a particular solution, Becker needs to

investigate his own presuppositions and take into consideration how they might be affecting his theory. Given that he fails to adequately question and describe what he means by the religious solution he proposes, Becker's readers are given the definition of a problem and no tangible way to deal with it. In other words, his readers come to understand that Becker believes they deny their death, this leads to harming others, and they should adopt the religious solution, but they are left to guess at what the religious solution entails. As a result of this lack of clarity, it is likely many of Becker's Western readers would fall back onto their traditional perspectives of religion as the institution of the Christian church. However, as previously explained, Becker does not define his religion in line with that of institutionalized religion, which he views as problematic. Therefore, through his lack of sufficient explanation about the religious solution, Becker might inadvertently be guiding his readers towards the automatic cultural perspective that concerned him. In total, Becker's readers are left uprooted not knowing what they should do about the fact that they must bolster their denial of death or how its even possible to not harm others in the process. Becker criticizes other thinkers who do not synthesize the social sciences to say something meaningful, but it could be easily argued he also does not say something straightforward or coherent enough to help guide future behavior. Even though Becker's interdisciplinary approach has led him to go beyond anthropology and psychology to take a philosophical or religious approach in postulating the possible and beneficial ways in which to approach our denial of death, his bewildering propositions are inadequate to uncover what we can and should do about the necessary protection of our denial of death.

Chapter Three: Terror Management Theorists, Experimental Psychologists: Support for Becker

I. Introduction to TMT

Despite the leaps and holes in Becker's argument, his basic theory that our denial of death affects our everyday lives is supported by modern experimental psychological research called Terror Management Theory (1970s-present). Terror Management Theory (TMT) emerged from Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon. As psychologists working at the University of Kansas in 1978, they bonded over frustrations that psychology seemed to be increasingly removed from what people were actually doing in their daily lives (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 4). After stumbling upon Becker's work, they became enthusiastically inspired because his theories attempted to explain the motivations of our everyday existence. In line with Becker, they formulated Terror Management Theory, which proposes the awareness of our mortality and our instinctual desire for self-preservation create a potential sense of terror that "is managed by a two component cultural anxiety-buffer: 1) faith in a culturally derived worldview which imbues subjective reality with order, meaning, permanence, and the promise of literal or symbolic death transcendence […]; and 2) the belief that one is meeting those standards of value (self-esteem)" (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 5). Said simply, TMT claims that people deny the overwhelming knowledge of their inevitable death by bolstering their cultural worldview and self-esteem, or what Becker generally labels as one's cultural heroic system. However, TMT researchers have gone much further than postulations. From the 1980s through today, dozens of researchers have conducted over 350 psychology

experiments within the branch of TMT, providing experimental validity for and building upon Becker's primary ideas (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 117).

II. Prototypical TMT Experiment

A. General Outline

A meta-analysis, or a summation of data from hundreds of experiments, revealed that most TMT experiments were performed with American undergraduate students as participants (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 177-179). In order to keep the actual intention of the experiment unknown, the participants usually begin by filling out one or two filler questionnaires. Following this initial task, the participants are exposed to the independent variable, which in most TMT experiments is Mortality Salience (MS), a reminder of one's death. Typically inducing MS involves asking participants to write two essays about their death: one about what they think will happen to them as they physically die and the other to describe the emotions they feel when thinking about dying. Additional types of MS manipulations include watching videos of car crashes, viewing documentaries about the holocaust, thinking about the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks, reading a story about a person who dies, or viewing slide shows that have a theme of death. In addition to a group of participants who are exposed to MS, there is also another group of participants exposed to a control condition. Typically, the control condition involves completing an essay task similar to that used in the MS condition, but instead of being about death, the content in the control essay is a different negative experience. Specific control conditions involve thinking about dental pain, contemplating paralysis, arousing general anxieties and worries, being

socially rejected, or having to give a speech in public (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 9).

After exposure to MS or the control condition, participants in a prototypical experiment complete a filler task, such as another questionnaire survey or word search, in order to create an intentional delay. Following the MS or control manipulation and the delay, the next phase in the prototypical TMT experiment is the collection of the dependent variable by measuring the participant's thoughts, beliefs, or behavioral response. In most TMT experiments, this stage of measuring the psychological response involves asking participants to express their attitude toward the author of an essay who disagrees with their worldview. However, there are a wide variety of other ways to examine a participant's response, such as cognitive measures to test for prejudicial or stereotypical beliefs. Additional ways to test responses to MS include behavior measures, such as seat choice, driving speed, hand strength, immersing one's hand in cold water, or donating to a charity. After all of the data is compiled, the experiment is concluded by running statistical analyses to understand whether MS had a significant effect on the thoughts, beliefs, or behaviors of the participants as compared to the control participants. In other words, TMT experiments test the difference in reactions of a person who is reminded of their death as compared to a person who is reminded of another negative experience.

B. Control Condition

The examination of data from hundreds of TMT experiments illustrates that control participants exposed to painful or terrifying experiences are consistently not affected in the same way as those exposed to awareness of their death (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 182).

For example, a prototypical experiment might include Participant A who writes an essay contemplating their death (MS condition) and Participant B who writes an essay contemplating paralysis (control condition). Following a delay, Participants A and B then might each be asked how they view an author of an essay who disagrees with their worldview. According to the theory and the demonstrated results collected thus far, Participant A would likely respond with harsher judgments and a greater dislike for the author who disagrees with their worldview than Participant B. By using control conditions that involve negative experiences, TMT research represents strong evidence against the possibility that people are affected by MS simply because it is a highly negative experience. As a result, TMT researchers argue "[T]here is something qualitatively different about the threat of death" (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 182); "death is of unique psychological importance" (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 121). TMT researchers understand their experiments as demonstrating that reminders of death alter a person's thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs in a more influential and distinct way as compared to other negative aspects of an individual's life.

C. Delay After Exposure to MS

Another important aspect of the prototypical experiment is the delay included after exposure to MS. This delay is used because it has been consistently shown to result in an increased impact of MS on the particular reaction(s) being tested by a given experiment (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 182). For example, after Participant A contemplates death and Participant B contemplates paralysis, they might each complete a word search. This word search is a filler task that is used to create a delay before their reactions are tested.

Perhaps there is also another condition in which, Participant C contemplates his or her death but does not complete any filler tasks, and thus does not experience a delay before his or her reactions are tested. According to research conducted thus far, Participant A would have harsher judgments and a greater dislike for an author who disagrees with their worldview than Participant B *and* Participant C.

A prominent way in which TMT researchers explain these results is by proposing a dual-process model, where death is first processed on a conscious level and then again on a non-conscious level. In particular, these researchers claim that after a person is reminded of their death, they will try to repress, hide, and remove this consciousness of death from their immediate thoughts (Vail et al. 307). Vail et. al explains, "conscious thoughts of death trigger pseudorational efforts to cope with one's vulnerability to mortality and thus push the topic out of focal awareness" (Vail et al. 306). Researchers claim that these thoughts do not disappear fully from the person's mind. Rather, after a period of time, these death thoughts are believed to re-emerge on a non-conscious level where death is still highly activated. Therefore, awareness of death is triggered in a second and non-conscious mode of processing. In addition, it is believed this non-conscious processing is even more impactful on emotions, thoughts, and behaviors than if awareness death were to remain in consciousness. Specifically, it is argued that this non-conscious processing is especially symbolic and cultural, which leads to, for example, a heightened defense of one's worldview (Vail et al. 307).

Therefore, the dual-process model explains in our example why Participant C, who did not have enough time to push death out of their consciousness, did not react as negatively to the oppositional worldview as Participant A. It is thought that because

Participant A completed the filler task before they reacted, Participant A had enough time to push their thoughts of death onto a more impactful, non-conscious level. Thus, it is believed that it is the non-conscious processing of Participant A, which resulted in Participant A's harsher judgments and a greater dislike for an author who disagrees with their worldview.

Many experiments have given validation to the dual-process model by demonstrating that the longer the delay following MS (i.e. the more filler tasks), the greater the effect of MS (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 184). This dual-process model is further substantiated by experiments that non-consciously prime death, such as subliminally flashing death-related words on a computer screen, locating the experiment within proximity to a cemetery or funeral home, or exposing participants to MS while they are distracted with cognitively straining tasks. Because these experiments directly activate death on the more impactful non-conscious level, unlike experiments that consciously activate death, these non-conscious experiments do not require a delay to greatly affect the reactions of the participants. In total, this dual-process model of TMT proposes that MS creates the greatest effect on our worldview and self-esteem only after death has been pushed out of consciousness and reaches a non-conscious level. As a result, TMT experiments typically attempt to test how non-conscious awareness of our death affects our everyday choices, reactions, and interactions.

III. Examples of the Variety of TMT Research

Through the completion of hundreds of studies similar to the prototypical experiment just described, TMT research has investigated a wide variety of ways in which

we are affected by reminders of our death. Some experiments even directly map onto and support Becker's theories. For example, experiments have confirmed that reminders of our death lead us to more adamantly reject our animality. Specifically, MS increases disgust reactions to essays emphasizing that we are animals. Similarly, MS also strengthens preference for an essay celebrating the uniqueness of humans over an essay highlighting our similarities to other animals (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 118). Another line of experiments demonstrates that thoughts of death expand our desire for self-esteem. More specifically, MS increases displays of driving skill and physical strength in people who base their self-esteem partially on such abilities (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 118). In addition, thinking about mortality heightens a person's appeal for immortality in various ways, such as increasing the desire to have children and be famous (Jonas and Fritsche 549; Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 118).

Beyond the research that directly coincides with Becker's theories, there has been a wide assortment of other types of TMT research conducted. In particular, other research has shown that conscious reminders of death can lead a person to displace their fear of death onto smaller threats like spiders and germs. For example, MS increases hand washing by participants who rank high in compulsive hand washing (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 128). Still other experiments expose the impact of MS on many different types of preferences, from what types of art we enjoy to what political candidate receives our vote (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 124; 130). These experiments are just a few illustrations of the breadth of TMT research conducted thus far.

IV. Defensive Results of MS

In addition to the broad variety of experiments just described, the majority of TMT research has more narrowly focused on the ways in which MS impacts our perception of and interaction with others. TMT experiments have displayed how MS intensifies in-group identity in that it leads participants to increase the value they place on their romantic partner and parents (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 119). Many other experiments confirm heightened disdain for people who are deemed outsiders, whose different beliefs threaten one's worldview and self-esteem. For example, following MS, people administered more of a spicy hot sauce to a person who criticized their political beliefs in comparison to the amount they gave a person who shared their beliefs (Jonas and Fritsche 545). Another experiment showed that judges who were reminded of their mortality recommended an average bond of $455 for an alleged prostitute, whereas judges who were not exposed to MS recommended an average bond of $50 (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 7). It is important to note MS does not straightforwardly lead to the punishing of transgressors. Rather, TMT suggests that a person confronted with their mortality wants to protect their self-esteem and worldview, and will do so by bolstering whoever is in their in-group and opposing whoever is in their out-group. Therefore, if the victim of a crime represented a threat to a judge's worldview placing them in the out-group, then the judge would be harsher on the victim by being more lenient on the perpetrator who would be considered within the in-group despite their behavior (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 129). In another experiment, Christian participants who were reminded of their death exhibited liking for a Christian student and disliking for Jewish student, but those who were not reminded of their mortality did not display any preference (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and

Solomon 8). In general, MS has consistently increased preference for one's in-group and hostility to one's out-group, showing support for Becker's theory.

In some TMT experiments, the opposition towards the out-group has manifested in more severe intentions of aggression. For example, American participants confronted with MS had an increased acceptance of extreme military force, including the use of nuclear and chemical weapons, in order to fight terrorism. Similarly, Iranian participants exposed to MS had an increased approval of suicide attacks against the US, whereas participants in the control condition disapproved of suicide attacks (Jonas and Fritsche 546). This experiment exposes the frightening self-fulfilling prophecy that occurs with MS. A country at war is bombarded with everyday reminders of death, such as constant news reports of fatalities and the prevalence of destroyed buildings. This increase in MS will likely increase the dislike for the out-group 'enemy' and the belief they should be harshly fought against. Then, this expanding negative perspective can lead to more attacks against the 'enemy' other, which in turn creates more reminders of death. The increase in MS for this 'enemy' other heightens the probability that they too will attack in retaliation. In this way, mortality salience can quickly escalate into and perpetuate war.

The majority of TMT research has focused on the defensive and detrimental consequences of MS. Thoughts of death have been shown to lead to prejudice, stereotyping, aggression, and racism, which can lead to violent intergroup conflict, and then can spiral into war. This concentration on the negative aftermath of death awareness is not surprising considering that Becker, the theoretical source of TMT, focused a great deal on the harmful aspects of our denial of death. Furthermore, the general trend of social psychology research at the time TMT was first emerging was the examination of malevolent behavior (Vail et al.

305). Because of this overwhelming concentration on the harmful consequences of MS, some TMT researchers are now trying to investigate more beneficial effects of death awareness (Vail et al. 305). While it is incredibly challenging to even define what is negative and detrimental and what is positive and beneficial, Vail et al. have proposed "positive" outcomes as those that "minimize harm to oneself and others, and promote well-being in physical, social, and psychological domains" (305). In short, at least a handful of TMT researchers are now turning towards uncovering ways that mortality salience can lead to a reduction of harm and an increase in "well-being."

V. Potentially Beneficial Consequences of MS

A specific line of experiments conduced by Vail et al. has examined the positive effects of consciously thinking about death (308). In particular, this research exposes that people who tend to think about mortality more than others oftentimes place greater importance on pursing intrinsic goals. Vail et al. defines intrinsic goals as the creation of personal meaningful goals, in contrast to extrinsic goals that they explain as the automatic adoption of culturally prescribed goals. Interestingly, this same result occurs in experiments that stimulate MS but do not use a delay. That is, people who are reminded of their death, and are asked about their goals while death is still consciously on their minds, place greater importance on pursuing intrinsic versus extrinsic goals. Vail et al. argue that intrinsic goals are beneficial in that they assist in making life more meaningful, enhance psychological well-being, and potentially can result in greater social cohesion (308). While it is unclear why conscious awareness of death relates to a valuation of intrinsic goals and

it is debatable if intrinsic goals are actually beneficial, these experiments still begin to reveal that thinking about death does not solely have detrimental effects.

Furthermore, if a person is reminded of positive values, thinking about death encourages behavior that aligns with these beliefs. Many experiments have shown that when MS is followed by a delay, a person will more vigorously adopt primed values. While the salient values are typically those of a person's culture and in-group, it is possible to alter the response following MS by priming other values instead. For example, if a person is primed with peace, acceptance, and openness, after being reminded of their death, they will likely respond in ways that conform to these values. In one experiment, participants who completed a word search task with terms about pacifism increased their support for peaceful strategies after MS (Jonas and Fritsche 551). Another especially interesting experiment began when a confederate, an accomplice to the experiment, talked loudly on a cell phone around people who subsequently became naïve participants (see Gailliot et al., 2008, Study 3 discussed in Vail et al. 311). The phone conversation the participants overheard was either about helping others or about a control topic. As the participants continued walking down the sidewalk, they encountered a second confederate who dropped a notebook and struggled with their backpack. Of the participants who were primed with helping, those who encountered the second confederate in front of a cemetery helped them 40% more of the time than those who were involved in the same experiment a block away from the cemetery. While the definitions of peaceful, helpful, accepting, and open are not straightforward and could potentially become problematic if left unquestioned, these experiments nevertheless demonstrate that MS does not necessarily lead to harming others and can instead result in empathetic responses.

In addition, other research has shown a decrease in the detrimental effects of MS when a person's conception of their in-group is expanded. MS has been shown to lead to the protection of one's in-group, so if people broaden who they consider to be in their in-group, they come to have concern for a larger group of people. For example, if a person comes to think of themselves as a European instead of a German, after being reminded of their death, they will likely come to see a French person in a more positive way than if they think of themselves more narrowly as a German (Jonas and Fritsche 551). Another way to expand one's in-group is to consider the similarities underlying humanity across the globe. One experiment primed American participants with either the universal threat of climate change or a local natural catastrophe. Participants who were primed with the global problem had an increased support for international peacemaking efforts and supported less militarism against Iran (Vail et al. 314). Other experiments have similar results that primed a broader sense of humanity simply by having participants read essays about favorite childhood experiences from around the world and then contemplating their own memories (Vail et al. 314). Again, these psychology studies demonstrate that thinking about mortality does not straightforwardly and absolutely lead to the harming of others, and by altering the content surrounding MS, death awareness can actually lead to compassionate behavior.

Reminding people of their mortality can lead to a variety of other potential benefits. Experiments have demonstrated thinking about death can encourage greater fitness and exercise intentions, reduce smoking intensity among smokers, and increase intentions to use sunscreen (Vail et al. 308). Other research has shown that elderly people who sense a limited amount of time remaining before they die tend to maximize the positive aspects of

their life and minimize the negative (Vail et al. 317). An additional line of experiments examines the potential positive impact of MS on depression. For example, depressed participants who are reminded of their death and then are given the opportunity to defend their worldview actually begin to see life as more meaningful (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 13). In another experiment, after MS and a creative writing exercise that focused on social connectedness, participants had increased positive mood, creative problem solving, and vitality, or what researchers call "positive psychological well being" (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 126). In total, TMT research has been able to go farther than Becker's theory in recent years, showing ways in which our awareness of mortality can be beneficial to life instead of automatically resulting in the escalation of stereotyping, prejudice, violence, and war.

VI. Dispositional Differences in Response to MS

In addition to TMT experiments that display the potentially beneficial consequences of thinking about death, other TMT research is beginning to explain the role of dispositional and personal factors in how people are affected by MS. One particular line of experiments establishes that hardiness can decrease the effects of MS. According to the experimenters Florian, Mikulincer, and Hirschberger, hardiness is a combination of a commitment to what one is doing in their lives, a belief that they have some control over results in life, and a perspective that challenge can lead to growth and is not just a threat (439). Their experiment revealed that, compared to Israeli students who were not exposed to MS, those who were confronted with their mortality gave harsher punishments for social transgressions. However, of the participants who were exposed to MS, those who also

scored low on hardiness gave the most severe punishments. In other words, students who were hardy did not have as intense of a defense against others when confronted with reminders of death.

Furthermore, Florian, Mikulincer, and Hirschberger maintain that people who rank high in hardiness tend to rely on active, transformational coping and are more flexible with decisions, and people who rank low in hardiness tend to prefer distancing coping strategies, such as repression or withdrawal behaviors (Florian, Mikulincer, and Hirschberger 441). As a result, they propose people who rank high in hardiness rely more on inner strength rather than on cultural worldviews, so they react to death in an active, transformational way, and thus do nothave as much of a need to bolster established cultural positions (Florian, Mikulincer, and Hirschberger 448). An alternative explanation the experimenters provide is that people who rank high in hardiness might not be as impacted by MS perhaps because they also have high self-esteem, and thus do not need to compensate as much for the decreased self-esteem that occurs from exposure to MS (Florian, Mikulincer, and Hirschberger 450). While the experimenters' concept of hardiness is not completely clear and indisputable, this experiment reveals how individuals respond differently when confronted with thoughts of death, showing that MS does not have a universal response amongst all people. In this way, TMT has been able to build on top of Becker's theory in that it is beginning to unpack the nuances involved in the different ways in which we deal with our denial of death.

Other experiments examine how some people respond to MS with less defense against their out-group. For example, MS has been shown to have less of an impact on people who believe they have control over events that affect them, what psychologists call

having a "high internal locus of control" (Jonas and Fritsche 548). In addition, MS leads to less pronounced responses from people who feel they are well ingrained within an in-group. Similarly, people who are reminded of having a secure relationship, such as a romantic partnership or offspring, respond with less opposition against others when reminded of death (Jonas and Fritsche 553). Also, people who are intrinsically religious and are able to reaffirm their beliefs prior to MS display decreased oppositional effects (Jonas and Fritsche 548). MS can sometimes even lead to self and social exploration among cognitively flexible, open-minded, or creative individuals (Vail et al. 316). Moreover, demographics have been shown to play a role in how people respond to MS. In particular, Burke's meta-analysis uncovered MS manipulations affected Americans significantly more than Europeans and Israelis, and also affected students in college more than those not in college. All of these results further show that MS does not straightforwardly lead to only one kind of aftereffect. In other words, this wide variety of TMT research exposes that awareness of our mortality greatly affects us, but it does so differently depending on the person and the context.

VII. Future Directions of TMT

While these experiments begin to reveal that there is not a universal response to MS, more research needs to explore how the particular, nuanced differences between people relate to the effects of MS. In particular, future experiments should clarify the details of individual dispositions in response to MS. Other research should investigate if there is a relation between the various types of immortality striving within a particular culture and the consequences following MS (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 123). Further

experiments should examine the distinct responses to MS across more diverse cultures throughout the globe (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 124). Also, research should look into whether a person's response to MS changes across their lifespan (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 125). By better understanding the specific dispositional and situational responses to MS, the beneficial consequences of thinking about one's death might become clearer.

Beyond the call for more detailed research, some TMT psychologists argue for the necessity of an amendment to Terror Management Theory as a whole. In particular, a handful of TMT researchers are looking at the work of Becker's predecessor and main influence, Otto Rank, who proposed *two* motivational systems. One motivation Rank describes is reducing anxiety caused by fear of life and death, which is what TMT has focused on thus far. The second motivation Rank proposes is creative will, a simultaneous striving to grow and expand. Given Rank's expanded focus, some TMT researchers postulate an individual is partially striving to reduce the terror of our death and, at the same time, also trying to open possibilities in life. As a result, these TMT psychologists are encouraging future research to investigate growth-expansion side by side with the terror-reduction already being investigated (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 130).

VIII. Validation for TMT

In total, through the use of psychological experimentation, TMT offers a coherent illustration of how death frequently affects us without our conscious realization, providing experimental support for some of Becker's theories. TMT experiments demonstrate that following reminders of death, people react in a way to increase their self-esteem and

worldview defense. This bolstering of one's identity that occurs following MS usually involves "intensified positive reactions to those who validate one's cherished beliefs and intensified negative reactions to those who threaten such beliefs" (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 9). Most of the research conducted to date has focused on the negative consequences of reminders of death, but other areas of TMT are starting to highlight the positive impacts of MS. In this way, TMT is moving beyond Becker's concentration on the harmful consequences of our mortality awareness to expose possible advantages. Yet there is a need for further testing of potential benefits that occur when thinking about death, detailed research into the different responses to MS, and an investigation into a parallel growth-expansion motivation. Through understanding that we have the tendency to be detrimentally affected by confrontations with mortality, and elucidating possible ways in which we can actually benefit from recognition of our finitude, TMT begins to give us the opportunity to use our death as a way to enhance and better life.

TMT does not oppose other psychological theories, but rather aims to explain the underlying 'why' behind the basic psychological entities these other theories describe (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 127). Despite the fact TMT ideas are not incongruent with contemporary psychology, they were initially completely rejected by the field of psychology (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 5). Given that dozens of researchers have conducted hundreds of TMT studies (Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 117), the field of psychology is beginning to pay attention to their experiments. However, there is still not wholehearted respect for TMT. There is hesitation from other scientists despite the fact that a meta-analysis that gathered data from almost 300 TMT experiments confirms "The magnitude of the effect was r=.35, which attained the top quartile of effects

for psychology in general and the 80th percentile for theories in personality and social psychology" (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 185). As a result, "the MS hypothesis of TMT—that death affects us without our conscious realization—is robust and produces moderate to large effects across a wide variety of MS manipulations as well as attitudinal, behavioral, and cognitive DVs" (Burke, Martens, and Faucher 187). In other words, it is highly statistically valid to say that MS affects our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. The founders of TMT also assert "the empirical support for this picture is now sufficiently strong that the role of terror management concerns should be considered in any comprehensive treatments of topics within the conceptual domain of the theory" (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski 123). While TMT researchers do not want to claim TMT as the sole motivation behind human life, they believe the social sciences need to take seriously the impact of our denial of death in everyday existence, especially because it has been experimentally demonstrated.

IX. Looking Beyond the Social Science of Death in Life

Becker and TMT should be applauded for pushing the boundaries of psychology, and for trying to approach existential topics through science. They help to uncover how pervasively and profoundly death affects our lives, especially clarifying the detrimental and unhealthy consequences of many of the ways we usually cope with death. However, Becker and TMT make few successful strides toward explaining what this means about who we are, and what, if anything, we can do about it. While Becker promotes religion as the best way to deny death, his inadequate description of what he means by religion leaves his readers confused. Becker does not provide a way to approach the existential problems he

begins to unfold. The experimental psychology of TMT supports and enhance many of Becker's theoretical postulations, and goes beyond Becker in beginning to expose possible ways in which death awareness can lead to beneficial consequences. However, TMT researchers also do not directly show us different ways to confront our mortality nor do they question the healthiness of our responses. While Becker and TMT succeed in their critique of our rejection of death, their positive response proves less than satisfying. The psychological approach begins to skim the ontic surface of our relation to death, but it does not penetrate into how death is an essential aspect of who we are.

Considering that he is a historian, Ariès too offers little illumination when it comes to making sense of how fundamental death is to our existence. Jacques Derrida, a continental philosopher, despite having respect for Ariès work, points out this issue and says, "The question of the meaning of death and of the word 'death,' the question 'What is death in general? or 'What is the experience of death?' and the question of knowing *if* death 'is'- and *what* death 'is'- all remain radically absent *as questions*" (25). According to Derrida, Ariès assumes that what is meant by death is self-explanatory. Indeed, at this point Derrida turns to Martin Heidegger, as we will do in the coming chapter, for Derrida sees Heidegger's rigorous ontological study of human life as taking precisely those precautions Ariès does not. Heidegger attempts to uproot widespread presuppositions about what death is. Derrida has his own philosophical agenda in referencing Ariès and Heidegger here, but for our purposes what is most important is his elucidation of the shortcomings of the social science investigations and the benefits of examining our mortality through the perspective of continental philosophy. By focusing more precisely on the possibilities of responding to death, continental philosophy can supplement the work of Ariès, Becker, and

TMT. Accordingly, Chapter Four of this thesis describes Heidegger's philosophy and Chapter Five explains Nietzsche's philosophical psychology in order to more comprehensively investigate the theme of death in life.

Chapter Four: Martin Heidegger, Continental Philosopher: Ontology of Death

I. Introduction to Heidegger

This thesis next turns towards Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a German philosopher well known for his work *Being and Time* published in 1927. The project of the book is an investigation into the Being of beings, an undertaking Heidegger claims no philosopher has ever truly attempted. In order to try to uncover what Being is, Heidegger constructs a new language. He oftentimes uses familiar words in novel ways to build a way in which to conceptualize Being. Furthermore, Heidegger employs a phenomenological method, approaching the question of Being through an examination of everyday phenomena. Specifically, Heidegger looks at our everyday existence in his examination of our being. He calls our being *'Dasein*,' which in German technically means something like "being there." Heidegger does not define Dasein as human being because he wants to stay away from making any claims about universal, absolute human nature or reality. In addition, Dasein is not just the way in which we live nor does Dasein signify consciousness or ego. Rather, Heidegger is trying to investigate the beings that we *are,* that I *am*, which he illustrates as distinct from all other types of being. He describes Dasein as unique in that it is a being concerned about its Being. Said differently, we are a distinct kind of being that has the potential to apprehend what Being is. Given Dasein's exceptional character, the method of Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* is elucidating our being, Dasein, in order to gain an understanding of Being in general.

II. Being-towards-Death

A. We Are In Relation Towards Our Death

Throughout *Being and Time* Heidegger uncovers various intertwining aspects of the ontological constitution of Dasein. Heidegger describes being-towards-death as one of the most central aspects of who we are. Heidegger's ideas are complexly connected, so they are less than ideal to separate from one another. However, because of the limitations of space and clarity, this chapter will concentrate on explicating the basics of Heidegger's idea of being-towards-death. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that this chapter is focusing on one piece of Heidegger's entire project, and thus is only beginning to scratch the surface of his concept of being-towards-death as it relates to his explanation of Being in general.

Heidegger philosophically investigates death on a different level than the social science of Ariès, Becker, and TMT. Heidegger is not just saying our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions are affected by our ultimate perishing. Rather, he defines our being as essentially toward death; we *are* constantly in relation to our death. Heidegger states, "Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. 'As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die'" (*BT* [MR] 289/*SZ* 245).[11] With this quote Heidegger is saying much more than the fact that I could die at any point, he is revealing that I, Dasein, *am* being-towards-death.

B. Not Experiencing Demise

Heidegger does not believe being-towards-death involves experiencing death. In particular, he claims that being-towards-death does not involve one 'dying' because Dasein cannot experience its own death. Heidegger states, in this "transition to no-longer-Dasein [Dasein] gets lifted right out of the possibility of experiencing this transition and of

understanding it as something experienced" *(BT* [MR] 281/*SZ* 237). When Dasein 'dies,' it cannot experience its lack of existence because then it no longer exists and is thus unable to experience its not existing. As a result, being-towards-death is not about Dasein's 'dying' in the sense of demise.

Beyond an inability to experience one's own death, Heidegger also asserts Dasein cannot experience the death, as being-towards-death, of another. Instead of having the unique type of being as a Dasein, the deceased ceases to *be* Dasein (*BT* [MR] 282/*SZ* 238). The deceased no longer maintains the unique being of Dasein, and comes to be more like that of a thing. Heidegger explains that the dead body becomes "an object of 'concern'" in the funeral rituals (*BT* [MR] 282/*SZ* 238). As soon as Dasein 'dies,' no one can experience them as Dasein, as the unique being that is being-towards-death. Therefore, Dasein cannot experience being-towards-death of another Dasein. We can witness the death of another, we can be alongside the dying, but we cannot experience being-towards-death of anyone but ourselves.

In addition to establishing that we cannot experience death, Heidegger points out that this underlying conception of death, as the last moment of one's life, is not the phenomenon of his inquiry. Dastur clarifies Heidegger's perspective and states, "For what essentially characterizes human being is the relation to its own death, which can never become an event in the world, since it constitutes the end of the world for the human being" (38). Heidegger is not interested in looking at death as the final event of transition from being-there to no-longer-being-there. In other words, he is not investigating what he calls "demise," the moment when life becomes death, nor is he examining a longer period of 'dying' that occurs towards the end of one's life. As a result, Heidegger does not want to

approach death from a biological or psychological perspective. Unlike the traditional perspective held in these disciplines, Heidegger does not consider our death as "a being-at-an-end" but a "*being towards the end*" (*BT* [JS] 236/*SZ* 245). Death is not the end moment(s) in life, but is rather is a part of our entire existence, an essential constitution of our being.

C. Not a Religious or Metaphysical Claim

Even though Heidegger distances himself from the idea of death as a physical end of life, it does not mean that he wants to look at death in a transcendental perspective. Specifically, Heidegger does not want to ask questions regarding the afterlife, such as whether it exists, is a higher or lower form of existence, or involves immortality (*BT* [MR] 292/*SZ* 248). Instead, Heidegger wants "our analysis of death [to remain] purely 'this-worldly'" (*BT* [MR] 292/*SZ* 248). Heidegger's desire to stay clear of these religious questions does not mean he is claiming these questions cannot be asked. Heidegger, as a phenomenologist, believes we must start our investigation from our everyday experience, 'this-worldly,' and only once we have achieved this foundation can we move on to other questions.

Heidegger also does not want to make any metaphysical claims about death. For example, he does not want to postulate how death came into the world, the 'meaning' of death, or if it is negative and evil (King 151). In a paper written shortly before *Being and Time* Heidegger says, "'Our aim here is not to offer a metaphysics of death but to understand the ontological structures of death within life'" (qtd. in Ireton 252). Again, the metaphysical question, like the religious question, is inappropriate and only could, if ever, be asked after the primary question about the ontology of death. For Heidegger, the

question of what death 'is' and in what way it 'is' has to be resolved before other questions of death can be investigated. Furthermore, Heidegger views all other disciplines that discuss death, such as biology and psychology, as also secondary to an existential analysis of death (*BT* [MR] 292/*SZ* 248). In this way, Heidegger is trying to uncover an understanding of our death that is fundamental and primary to what Ariès, Becker, and TMT presuppose that they are investigating.

D. Unlike 'Death' of Other Beings

Heidegger differentiates his idea of Dasein's being-towards-death from the 'death' of other kinds of beings. In particular, Heidegger claims that Dasein's being-towards-death is not like the "death" of an animal, or what he titles "perishing" (*BT* [MR] 284/*SZ* 240). Just as he believes Dasein cannot experience the end-of-life, of either itself or of another Dasein, Heidegger argues Dasein's being-towards-death is distinct from the end-of-life of other types of living beings.

In addition, Heidegger explains that death is a kind of 'not yet' for Dasein, since insofar as Dasein is, it is not yet dead. However, Heidegger illustrates that Dasein's not-yet is distinct compared to other kinds of not-yets. Specifically, he describes that the death of Dasein is not like an owed debt to be repaid in the future, a not-yet completed repayment (*BT* [MR] 287/*SZ* 243). Dasein is not a sum of parts where death is the missing part that eventually adds up to make Dasein whole. Therefore, because Dasein is not like an object that eventually is completed, being-towards-death is not an outstanding aspect of Dasein.

The death of Dasein is also unlike the dark side of the moon, a not-yet perceived (*BT* [MR] 287/*SZ* 243). This not-yet seen part of the moon does not refer to the being of the

moon, but only involves our perception of the moon from earth. Unlike the moon, our being is not entire from the start, and unlike the dark side of the moon, our death is not just hidden because of a limited perspective. Instead, Dasein must *become* its death.

Furthermore, the death of Dasein is not like a fruit ripening (*BT* [MR] 287/*SZ* 243). Heidegger contends that a ripening fruit is more similar to Dasein's death than the other two examples in that it is not a static existence. Heidegger explains, "The 'not-yet' has already been included in the very Being of the fruit, not as some random characteristic, but as something constitutive. Correspondingly, as long as any Dasein is, it too *is already its 'not-yet'*"(*BT* [MR] 288/*SZ* 244). Like a fruit ripening, death is a part of the being of Dasein. However, Heidegger argues that the example of ripening still does not fully represent Dasein's death. A fruit constantly moves closer to ripeness as soon as it manifests into existence. When a fruit ripens, it becomes complete in a sense of fulfilling itself. However, when Dasein dies, it usually does not mean that Dasein has fulfilled its specific possibilities (*BT* [MR] 288/*SZ* 244). Most of the time Dasein dies unfulfilled or else has "disintegrated and been used up" (*BT* [MR] 288/*SZ* 244). Regardless of what example is used, Heidegger elucidates the being-towards-death of Dasein as distinct and unique compared to the 'death' of all other beings, whether animate or inanimate.

E. Ontological Constitution

An essential aspect of Heidegger's understanding of being-towards-death is that it is not the opposite of life. Heidegger does not see a clear opposition between life and death. He says, "Death, in the widest sense, is a phenomenon of life"(*BT* [MR] 290/*SZ* 246). As a phenomenologist, Heidegger is interested in how phenomena appear to us in our

experience. Therefore, he is interested in looking at how death manifests within our everyday lives. Heidegger's investigation examines how we are always relating to death, as continuously being towards death every moment of our lives. However, it is important to keep in mind that Heidegger does not view our relation to death as only the ways in which our lives are affected by the eventual event of our demise. Instead, Heidegger views our death as a fundamental aspect of our being. Magda King, a researcher working on Heidegger, explains it well, "In the existential sense, death is not a 'fact,' an occurrence within the world; there is death only in the being of a Dasein to his end, which in one way or another is constantly disclosed to him" (157). Being-towards-death is an ontological constitution of Dasein.

F. Ownmost, Nonrelational, Certain, Indefinite, and Insuperable Possibility

In addition to positively describing being-towards-death as an ontological constitution of Dasein, Heidegger provides a more specific definition of being-towards-death. In particular, Heidegger defines death as the "ownmost, nonrelational, certain and, as such, indefinite and insuperable possibility of Dasein" (*BT* [JS] 248/*SZ* 259). Heidegger explains these terms in a way that makes them difficult to parse out into separate descriptions. As a result, this section will aim to more generally explain what these terms imply together.

To begin, Heidegger explains that because death is the possibility of the impossibility of our existence, death is our most extreme possibility. Said differently, death is a peculiar possibility because it is what halts all other possibilities. Heidegger asserts that out of all of our possibilities, death is the possibility that is most one's own.[12]

Heidegger states, "*No one can take the Other's dying away from him*" (*BT* [MR] 284/*SZ* 240). My death cannot be undergone by anyone else; no one else can die my death. While Dasein can die for another by sacrificing itself, the Dasein who was initially spared from dying will eventually have to die. In addition, Dasein cannot face its death with others; it must experience its death on it own. Heidegger explains that death "individualizes Dasein down to itself" (*BT* [MR] 308/*SZ* 263). Because only I can die my death, my death creates a separate 'me.' Death is thus paradoxical in that it is mine, and it makes a 'me' and 'mine,' but does so because it is also not-yet mine. Heidegger additionally points out that death is certain in that it will come for every Dasein, and death is insuperable in that it cannot be overcome. However, even though death is sure to come, it is indefinite in that Dasein does not know when and how death will occur.

III. Possibilities of Inauthenticity and Authenticity

A. How We Can Relate to Our Being-towards-Death

While Ariès, Becker, and TMT explain how life is greatly affected by death, Heidegger goes beyond these social scientists in describing death as a part of our being. Over and above explaining who we are as fundamentally tied to our mortality, Heidegger also exceeds these social scientists in his exposing possible ways in which we can reconcile this part of who we are. Heidegger lays forth multiple ways in which we can relate to our death. That is, Heidegger describes that we can understand our death either inauthentically or authentically.

B. Inauthentic Being-towards-Death

1. Fundamental Tendency

Heidegger describes how Dasein has a fundamental tendency for an inauthentic understanding of its being-towards-death. He asserts, "proximally and for the most part Dasein covers up its ownmost Being-towards-death, fleeing *in the face* of it" (*BT* [MR] 295/*SZ* 251). In other words, we tend to reject death as the possibility that it is; we typically relate to our death with denial.

Heidegger further explains that our rejection of being-towards-death exposes that, on some level, we already 'know' about our death. For example, Heidegger describes that everyday "Dasein is acquainted with death's certainty, and yet evades *Being*-certain" (*BT* [MR] 302/*SZ* 258). As previously described, certainty is one aspect of the possibility of death. Therefore, when Dasein "evades *Being*-certain," Dasein is rejecting death as the possibility that it is. Heidegger argues that Dasein can only reject the certainty of death because it already 'knows' that death is certain. Put simply, in order to run from something, one must recognize there is something to run away from. Therefore, Dasein typically denies its fundamental understanding of death as the possibility that it is. Said differently, Dasein tends to inauthentically disown its awareness that it is a being-towards-death.

2. Everyday Preoccupations with Things

One way that Dasein inauthentically undermines death as the possibility that it is, is through distracting itself with its everyday dealings with things. Heidegger says, "Everyday taking care of things makes definite for itself the indefiniteness of certain death by interposing before it those manageable urgencies and possibilities of the everyday matters

nearest to us" (*BT* [JS] 248/*SZ* 258). Dasein rejects the uncertainity of death by getting wrapped up in its daily interactions with things. In our everyday lives, we are constantly dealing with things, such as using cellphones, paying bills, driving cars, feeding the pet, fixing up the house, or working through a complicated thought. By preoccupying itself in dealing with things, Dasein forgets the uncontrollability of death in its controlling things. Said differently, in our interactions with things, we become distracted and forget that we are being-towards-death.

On a more ontological level, in its preoccupations with things, Dasein also disowns the possibility of its death through conceptualizing its being as like that of a thing. One of Heidegger's most basic ideas is that Dasein is being-in-the-world. We, ourselves, *are* in the world. While people typically reflect on themselves as an "I" who exist separately from their interactions in the world, Heidegger asserts that Dasein actually exists in its encounters with other beings in the world. Heidegger explains, "Dasein has always already stepped out beyond itself…it is in a world. Consequently, it is never anything like a subjective inner sphere" (*BPP* 170). Dasein *is* its interactions.

Because Dasein *is* its dealings with other beings, Dasein cannot step back and look at itself as a separate entity. The only way to see itself is indirectly through a reflection in the beings it encounters, much like looking at a mirror. Heidegger explains, Dasein "never finds itself otherwise than in things…that daily surround it. It finds *itself* primarily and constantly *in things* because, tending them, [assailed] by them, it always in some way or other rests in things" (*BPP* 159). Dasein can only see itself in the things with which it interacts. Said simply, in its interacting with things, Dasein comes to understand itself through things.

As a consequence of Dasein understanding itself through its reflection in the beings it encounters, Dasein comes to understand its being to be like that of these entities. Heidegger says Dasein understands itself "proximally and for the most part […] in terms of that with *which* it is customarily concerned" (*BT* [MR] 283/*SZ* 239). As a result of understanding itself through things, it becomes easy for Dasein to think of itself *as* a thing. Because Dasein is a being-in-the-world, it *is* its everyday interactions, and thus tends to see itself as what it interacts with. Thus, Dasein comes to view itself as a thing instead of as Dasein, a unique kind of being.

In viewing itself as a thing, Dasein inauthentically conceives of its death as 'perishing' or 'demising.' That is, Dasein tends to forget that it is a being-in-the-world, a way of being that is a being-towards-death. When Dasein understands itself as a thing, a "being-produced," Dasein perceives itself as created by someone else, determined for a specific purpose (*BPP* 154). As a result, Dasein oftentimes does not perceive its potentiality. For the most part, Dasein inauthentically understands itself as a thing instead of authentically grasping its possibilities, especially its most extreme possibility of being-towards-death.

3. Falling Prey in Idle Talk of The They

a. The They

Another way Dasein's tendency for an inauthentic being-towards-death manifests is through the idle talk of The They. Heidegger uses the term *Das Man* or "The They" in order to signify the impersonal anonymous public rule. Technically, *Das Man* means something like "One" in English, as compared to "I" or "you" or "she." In this way, The They refers to society as a whole entity itself.

Heidegger explains that The They is not something separate from me. He states, "For the most part *I myself* am not the 'who' of Dasein; the they-self is its 'who' (*BT* [MR] 312/*SZ* 267). Heidegger understands Dasein to not typically embrace its being as Dasein; Dasein tends not to own its being as the being it is. Instead, Dasein usually is a part of The They, a they-self doing what "One" should do instead of what Dasein itself determines. Heidegger illustrates,

> We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge it. But we also withdraw from the 'great mass' the way *they* withdraw, we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness. (*BT* [JS] 123/*SZ* 127)

In being a part of The They, an amorphous indeterminate public authority, Dasein is disburdened from the responsibility of making its own judgments and decisions (*BT* [JS] 124/*SZ* 127). Therefore, when Dasein embraces its they-self, it is able to unthinkingly follow the prescriptions provided by The They.

b. Idle Talk

The way in which The They communicates is through "idle talk." Idle talk refers to the everyday habitual discourse of society. Heidegger asserts that through idle talk we typically inauthentically undermine death as the possibility that it is. Heidegger explains that while it is infrequent that a person talks about death, if a person does, it is an assertion that "one dies" (*BT* [JS] 243/*ST* 253). Through the use of the concept of "one," death is "leveled down," the threat of death becomes distributed across the public. In this way,

Dasein "can convince him/herself that in no case it is I myself [who dies], for this one is *no one*" (*BT* [JS] 243/*ST* 253). Within idle talk, the term "one" makes it seem as if an anonymous other dies, and I do not.

In addition, idle talk reduces the indefinite quality of death, hiding the fact it could come now or at any moment. More specifically, the tense used in the phrase "one dies" pushes death to an undetermined future date, covering over that it is a current threat. Similarly, The They uses other idle talk such as "'Death certainly comes, but not right away'" (*BT* [MR] 302/*SZ* 258). Heidegger explains that through this phrase, The They "implant[s] in Dasein the illusion that it is *itself* certain of its death" (*BT* [MR] 301/*SZ* 257). In this idle talk, The They convinces itself that it accepts death as inevitable and thus thinks it is not denying death, yet, at the same time, is able to also still deny death's indeterminacy.

Furthermore, Heidegger illustrates that in idle talk, "Death gets passed off as something 'actual'; its character as a possibility gets concealed" (*BT* [MR] 297/*SZ* 253). When we say "one dies," we understand death as a physical occurrence, a *thing* that happens to us. That is, through idle talk, we conceptualize death as an actual event, and do not realize that we are constantly in relation to our death in that we are being-towards-death. Through talking about death, we come to forget that death is my existential possibility.

In total, through idle talk we proudly convince ourselves that we acknowledge death as a fact. However, in doing so, we hold our own death far enough away so we do not have to authentically grasp it as the extreme possibility that it is. As a result, through idle talk, Dasein is able to deny that it denies it death.

c. Falling Prey

Heidegger explains that through idle talk Dasein "falls prey" to The They. In idle talk, The They eclipses Dasein's mode of being-towards-death, and coerces Dasein into inauthenticity. Said differently, society's denial of death pressures us to forget about the possibility of our own death. Heidegger says, "The 'they' gives its approval, and aggravates the *temptation* to cover up from oneself one's ownmost Being-towards-death" (*BT* [MR] 297/*SZ* 253). The They are so insistent on covering over being-towards-death that The They evens tries to convince a dying person that he or she will "soon return to the tranquillized everydayness of the world of [his or her] concern" (*BT* [MR] 297/*SZ* 253). That is, The They tells the dying that they actually are not dying and will soon be able to return to their lives. Heidegger explains that The They imposes this tranquilization not so much to console the person dying, but in order to maintain the public covering over of death (*BT* [MR] 297/*SZ* 253).

In addition, Heidegger explains that when someone dies, it is percieved as a "social inconvenience, if not even a downright tactlessness, against which the public is to be guarded" (*BT* [MR] 298/*SZ* 254). Society views death as an annoying problem rather than as each of our most extreme possibilities. Furthermore, society also understands contemplating death as a weakness. Heidegger explains that The They have deemed "'thinking about death' [a] cowardly fear, a sign of insecurity on the part of Dasein, and a somber way of fleeing from the world" (*BT* [MR] 298/*SZ* 254). Heidegger even goes so far as to assert, "*The they does not permit the courage*" to authentically be-toward-death (*BT* [JS] 244/*ST* 254). Through idle talk, Dasein falls prey to the demands from The They to not be worried when dying is immanent, to be irritated when everyday life is interrupted by a

death, and to consider it detrimental to think about death. As a result, the idle talk of The They makes it incredibly challenging for Dasein to resist an inauthentic being-towards-death.

It is important to note that Dasein's falling prey to The They occurs because of the being Dasein is. Remember Dasein is being-in-the-world, and comes to understand itself in its interactions with other beings. As previously explained, one type of these other beings are things. Therefore, Dasein tends to understand itself as a thing, a being-produced with a pre-determined purpose. However, as a being-in-the-world, Dasein also interacts with other Daseins, which make up The They. Correspondingly, in its daily interactions with other Daseins, Dasein also tends to inauthentically understand itself as a they-self pre-determined by The They. Therefore, as a consequence of being-in-the-world, Dasein comes to inauthentically understand itself, pre-determined both as a being-produced thing and as a they-self.

4. Tendency as Ontological Constitution of Dasein

In sum, because of the being Dasein is, Dasein in its everyday interactions becomes preoccupied with things and falls prey in the idle talk of The They. As a result, Dasein typically forgets that it is a unique being. Dasein instead comes to view itself as pre-determined like a thing and by The They, and thus Dasein has a fundamental tendency to cover over its ownmost potentiality of being. Dasein forgets that is a being-towards-death, so Dasein also proximally and for the most part is inauthentically being-towards-death, disowning death as the possibility that it is. This misunderstanding of its being is not illusory, un-genuine, or immoral, but is simply a part of Dasein's being as a being-in-the-

world (*BPP* 160). Heidegger states, the "inauthenticity of Dasein does not signify a 'lesser' being or a 'lower' degree of being" (*BT* [JS] 42/*SZ* 43). Rather, "inauthenticity belongs to the essential nature of factical Dasein" (*BPP* 171). The tendency for inauthentic being-towards-death is a part of Dasein's ontological constitution.

C. Authentic Being-towards-Death

1. Possibility for Authentic Being-towards-Death

Heidegger argues that authenticity is another way in which we can relate to our death. Even though Dasein has a tendency for inauthenticity, Dasein has the possibility for authenticity. Heidegger explains, "Dasein does not necessarily and constantly have to divert itself into [the] kind of Being [of inauthenticity]" (*BT* [MR] 303/*SZ* 259). As previously explained, Dasein is able to flee from its being-towards-death only because it has an underlying awareness of its death. This same pre-ontological 'knowledge' about death provides Dasein with the potentiality to re-gain the awareness of its being-towards-death, and thus become authentic.

Also as described above, one consequence of being-in-the-world is Dasein's tendency to misunderstand and reject its unique being. However, another result of being-in-the-world is that it is what makes Dasein fundamentally unique and able to belong to itself. Heidegger explains, "because Dasein is always essentially its possibility, it *can* 'choose' itself in its being [or] it can *lose* itself" (*BT* [JS] 42/*ST* 43). That is, because of the being Dasein is, Dasein has a tendency to fall into inauthenticity and forget itself *and* Dasein has the possibility to authentically understand itself and exist for its own sake. Therefore, inauthenticity is only a tendency, not a permanent determination. Because the being of

Dasein is not actually pre-determined by The They or a being-produced like that of a thing, Dasein can determine itself. Dasein has the possibility to understand itself otherwise, and do so freely, without having its self-understanding imposed by others. Dasein can authentically apprehend its death.

2. Embracing Death as Possibility

While inauthenticity is a disownment of the possibility of one's death, authenticity is taking hold of and owning one's death as possibility. Authenticity is understanding death as possibility and sustaining it as possibility. Heidegger explains, "this possibility must not be weakened: it must be understood *as a possibility*, it must be cultivated *as a possibility,* and we must [sustain] it *as a possibility*, in the way we comport ourselves towards it" (*BT* [MR] 306/H 261). Authentic being-towards-death is a particular relation to one's death, one that endures death as one's most extreme possibility that is ownmost, non-relational, indefinite, insuperable, and certain.

3. Not an Actualization of Death

Embracing death as possibility does not involve experiencing death. As previously explained, Dasein cannot experience its own death, so authenticity does not involve seeking out one's own 'death,' as in killing oneself or putting oneself in situations with a high probability of demise. If Dasein died, death would cease to be a possibility. Similarly, authentic being-towards-death does not involve being in the proximity of the demise of others, such as by fighting in a war or working in a hospital or mortuary. Again, these situations are that of demise and not being-towards-death. Moreover, within these social

circumstances, Dasein is not embracing death as its *own* possibility. In addition to not involving the act of 'death' or demise, authenticity also does not entail thinking about and dwelling on death. Heidegger asserts that brooding over death weakens its character of possibility (*BT* [JS] 250/*ST* 261). That is, ruminating is an attempt to make death into some*thing*, a calculated idea, instead of approaching death authentically as an indefinite and insuperable possibility. Therefore, authentic being-towards-death does not involve the actualization of one's own death, another's death, or the thought of death.

4. Not Separating Oneself from the World

Even though death is Dasein's ownmost possibility and individuates Dasein, authentic being-towards-death does not involve embracing oneself as separate from the world. Remember that Dasein is a being-in-the-world, so authentic being-towards-death must involve accepting oneself as such, as a being connected to its interactions with things and other Daseins. Therefore, authentic being-towards-death does not involve a removal of oneself from the world where one encounters others and things everyday. Heidegger asserts authentic being-towards-death does not "signify a kind of seclusion in which one flees the world" (*BT* [MR] 358/*SZ* 310). In this way, authentic being-towards-death does not require a life like an isolating religious hermitage. In authenticity, Dasein must own itself as what it *is*, a being-in-the-world who is a being-towards-death.

D. The Process of Authenticity

1. Anxiety

If authentic being-towards-death does not involve experiencing death nor does it entail removing oneself from the everyday world, then how can Dasein embrace death as the possibility that it is? Heidegger describes anxiety as a key component of authentic being-towards-death. In particular, he says, "anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of 'weakness' in some individual; but, as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end" (*BT* [MR] 295/*SZ* 251). In other words, anxiety is what reveals to us our being-towards-death. As a result, to even begin to be authentic, Dasein requires the disclosedness of its death, which manifests as anxiety in order to apprehend its being as constantly in relation with its death.

More specifically, anxiety opens up death as possibility. Dastur explains, "anxiety [...reveals] the most extreme possibility, the collapse of all possibilities that is death" (18). However, it is important to note that even though anxiety opens up the possibility of death, it does not determine the mode in which Dasein understands the possibility of death. That is, anxiety does not automatically determine that Dasein will authentically be-towards-death; anxiety can also lead to an inauthentic relation towards death.

In particular, Dasein can authentically embrace the openness of its being-towards-death revealed in anxiety. Or Dasein can inauthentically reject the being-towards-death that anxiety revealed and instead try to transform the anxiety into fear. Heidegger explains that through the idle talk of The They, anxiety of death is transformed into fear of demise (*BT* [MR] 298/*SZ* 254). However, Heidegger asserts, "Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise" (*BT* [MR] 295/*SZ* 251). A person who is anxious experiences a generalized feeling of uneasiness and cannot take any concrete steps to relieve what seems to be an ambiguous and open threat. In contrast, a person who has

fear is scared of a specific object that they can make preparations to try to conquer. Therefore, anxiety of death keeps open the possibility of death, but fear of death strips the character of possibility from death. In total, Dasein inauthentically falls prey to The They, which involves becoming afraid of the moment of 'death,' in order to try to relieve the fundamental anxiety of its constant relation to death. Nevertheless, Dasein can instead authentically determine itself and embrace its fundamental anxiety of the possibility of death.

Dastur describes that the authentic embracing of anxiety does not entail an overcoming of an anxious state of mind, but is a remaining within anxiety (42). She explains, we must "stop opposing anxiety with vain resistances and let ourselves be borne by it in order thus to achieve that moment when it changes into joy" (42). Heidegger too mentions this joy when he says, "Along with the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized potentiality-for-Being, there goes an unshakable joy in this possibility" (*BT* [MR] 358/*SZ* 310). In pointing out the joy of anxiety, Heidegger and Dastur challenge the, at least current, notion that anxiety of death is problematic and proposing it as actually transformative and beneficial. In this way, Heidegger's philosophy can be understood as echoing the beliefs of Ariès, Becker, and TMT. The incredibly challenging task of maintaining one's anxiety of their being-towards-death is necessary to begin to authentically be-towards-death.

2. Vorlaufen: Anticipation and Running Ahead

Heidegger describes *Vorlaufen* as another key component of authentic being-towards-death, which is translated from German into English as either anticipation or,

more literally, as running ahead. Heidegger seems to explain anxiety as revealing the possibility of death, and running ahead as the authentic engagement of that possibility of death. Said differently, running ahead is the authentic relating to our being-towards-death that anxiety reveals.

One reason why anticipation is chosen to translate *Vorlaufen* is because Heidegger contrasts *Vorlaufen* with expectation. Heidegger defines expectation as a "*waiting for [an] actualization*" (*BT* [MR] 306/*SZ* 262). One always expects some*thing*. In other words, an expectation is a desire to complete or actualize a potentiality. Therefore, expecting death involves removing the character of possibility from death, making expectation inauthentic. In opposition, anticipation is indefinite and does not involve accomplishing what one anticipates. Therefore, Heidegger sees anticipation of death as authentically holding open and sustaining the possibility of death.

Vorlaufen is also translated as running ahead because it signifies a jolting forth, a breaking away, an intense bolting forward. Running ahead is not just a peaceful walk in the park, but is an intense movement of impact and shattering. In this way, running ahead abruptly awakens Dasein, destroying the tranquility of the habitual they-self. Through this abrupt motion of running ahead, Dasein is "wrenched away from [The They]" (*BT* [MR] 307/*SZ* 263). Heidegger states, "When, by [running ahead], one becomes free *for* one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one" (*BT* [MR] 308/*SZ* 264). In running ahead, Dasein is jerked free from going with the flow of what is instructed and prescribed by society.

Because running ahead frees Dasein from The They, Heidegger explains that *Vorlaufen* brings Dasein back to itself. That is, running ahead does not entail running away,

nor is running ahead like the physical fleeing movement from one place to another. Running ahead is not a linear going forward. Instead, Heidegger asserts that running ahead is a cycling back to oneself[13] in a full embracing of one's being. In running ahead into death, Dasein is individualized down to itself, is able to take hold of its own life, and can exist for its own sake. Heidegger states, in running ahead "one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factical possibilities [that are subordinate to] that possibility which is not to be outstripped" (*BT* [MR] 308/*SZ* 264). While Dasein cannot overcome the possibility of its death, running ahead into death opens up and enables Dasein to take hold of the possibilities of its life.

In this way, Heidegger asserts that we are essentially open, futural, and life is possible *because* we are being-towards-death. Thus, authentic being-towards-death is the understanding and utilization of the fact that it is because we are finite beings that we are also beings of possibility. King clarifies, "It is only by running forward to the certain possibility of not-being-able-to-be-here-anymore that the 'I-am-able-to-be-here' itself is eminently revealed" (204). Similarly Dastur adds, "the essential transitoriness and precariousness of [Dasein's] being is also what allows it to be open to itself, to others, and to the world. Death would then no longer appear as a scandal, but rather as the very foundation of our existence" (44). Death illuminates the possibilities of life. It is through an authentic embracing of our most extreme possibility of death that we are able to take hold of our life in all its possibilities.

3. Resoluteness

An additional central aspect of authentic being-towards-death is *Entschlossenheit,* usually translated from German into English as resoluteness, but could be better understood as resolute-openness. Resolute-openness is a process of authentically understanding and apprehending our being as being-towards-death. Heidegger understands that in authentically being-towards-death, running ahead is on the ontological level and resolute-openness is on the ontic level. Heidegger explains the ontological as a more fundamental level of Being in general, which requires an "existential" and more theoretical understanding. The ontic, he describes, involves the experiential, everyday interactions with other beings in the world and an "existentiell" understanding (*BT* [JS] 12/*SZ* 13). Heidegger states, "authentic Being-towards-death is [*Vorlaufen*]. Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being, in its existentiell attestation [is] *resoluteness*" (*BT* [MR] 349/*SZ* 302). In this way, Heidegger explains that the way in which to experientially authentically be-towards-death is through resolute-openness.

Heidegger illustrates that resolute-openness occurs through making oneself ready for the call of conscience.[14] Conscience, for Heidegger, is not an internal subjectivity, so it is not an individual's moral voice inside of their minds. In addition, Heidegger is not concerned with the origins of conscience, such as in the realm of religion, nor does he want to consider why we might have conscience, such as through the study of evolutionary science. Furthermore, Heidegger does not want to examine conscience as it relates to philosophical ethics or metaphysics. Instead, Heidegger understands conscience as an appeal to "Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self" (*BT* [MR] 314/*SZ* 269). In other words, conscience is a type of disclosure of Dasein to itself.

The way in which conscience reveals to Dasein its ownmost being is through a call. The call of conscience interrupts the idle talk of The They. Heidegger explains that in the idle talk of The They, Dasein "*fails to hear* [*überhört*] its own Self in listening to the they-self" (*BT* [MR] 315/*SZ* 271). The call does not cut off the idle talk of The They by becoming louder or by speaking more words. Instead, the call of conscience is able to break apart Dasein's entanglement with The They through silence.

Given that the call is silent, Dasein can only understand the call in itself. The 'voice' of the call is not an utterance, but a personal understanding. The call is understood only by the individual. As a result, Dasein cannot communicate its conscience to another Dasein. Beyond being silent and completely personal, the call of conscience says nothing. In this way, the call of conscience provides no content, guidance, or suggestions. Conscience does not inform Dasein to make the right decisions. Furthermore, it is not as if Dasein only listens once to the silent call of conscience in order to be freed permanently from The They. The call of conscience must be listened to and retrieved ever anew. Because the call is silent, individual, without explicit content, and not absolute, the call leads Dasein to its particular manifestation of authenticity distinct from that of other Daseins.

However, even though conscience is obscure, specific to each individual, and "seemingly indefinite, the *direction it takes* is a sure one and is not to be overlooked" (*BT* [MR] 318/*SZ* 274). Like *Vorlaufen,* the call of conscience involves a forward movement into Dasein's possibilities. Heidegger states, conscience "calls Dasein forth (and 'forward') into its ownmost possibilities" (*BT* [MR] 318/*SZ* 273). Ireton clarifies that the silent call of conscience "summons Dasein *from* its inauthentic entanglement in the they and *forward into* an authentic understanding of its possibilities" (272). Therefore, instead of a clear

verbal moralizing, Heidegger understands conscience as calling an opening-forward of Dasein into its possibilities.

In opening up Dasein to its possibilities, the call of conscience provides Dasein with an authentic self-understanding. The call of conscience is not a critical and negative message, nor does the call provide a set path of action. Instead of telling Dasein what to do, the silent call of conscience reveals to Dasein who it is. Heidegger states, "The call of conscience fails to give any such 'practical' injunctions, *solely because* it summons Dasein to existence, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self" (*BT* [MR] 340/*SZ* 294). That is, similar to *Vorlaufen,* conscience calls Dasein forward which is a bringing Dasein back to itself (*BT* [MR] 317/*SZ* 273). Furthermore, the being that Dasein gets brought back to is not like an inner subjective sphere, as in a separated "I" from the world. Instead, the call reveals to and brings Dasein back to itself as a being-in-the-world that is being-towards-death (*BT* [MR] 344/*SZ* 298). Because it is not a prescription but the bringing us back to ourselves, King explains that the silent call of conscience does not necessarily change our behaviors, but, rather, transforms our being (164).

Furthermore, this resoluteness of coming back to oneself is contrasted with an irresolute inauthentic succumbing to the pre-determination of The They. Heidegger illustrates an irresolute Dasein is entangled in the "common sense ambiguity of that publicness in which nobody resolves upon anything but which has always made its decision" (*BT* [MR] 345/*SZ* 298). Therefore, resoluteness, like running ahead, breaks Dasein away from its tendency for inauthentic irresolute falling into The They and brings Dasein to itself to determine its own being.

Nevertheless, Dasein cannot force this coming back to itself. Heidegger maintains that all Dasein can do is become free for the call of conscience. Heidegger says, "Understanding the call is choosing; but it is not a choosing of conscience, which as such cannot be chosen. What is chosen is […] '*wanting to have a conscience*'" (*BT* [MR] 334/*SZ* 288). Dasein cannot straightforwardly compel conscience to call, and is only able to make itself ready for the call. King clarifies that making oneself ready for the call is "steadfastly willing to be called forward to the owning which lies in [one's] own existence" (195). Given that the call of conscience is silent and says nothing, it necessitates a different kind of hearing, a particular orientation from us to receive it, one that is open, willing, and wanting to be brought back to our being (*BT* [MR] 316/*SZ* 271).

Considering that conscience has thus far been described as not originating from a pure internal subject, it might seem that Heidegger views the call of conscience as coming from an outside source. However, Heidegger explains the call of conscience comes both from Dasein *and* over and above Dasein (*BT* [MR] 320/*ST* 275). The call of conscience is neither internally subjective nor is it external. Heidegger clarifies, "the call is precisely something which *we ourselves* have neither planned nor […] voluntarily performed […] On the other hand, the call undoubtedly does not come from someone else who is with me in the world" (*BT* [MR] 320/ *SZ* 275). Said differently, the call of conscience does not come solely from within Dasein, nor does it come from a source entirely separate from Dasein. Dasein is a being-in-the-world, and is not an inner subjective "I" that acts out onto an external world. As a result, Dasein cannot command conscience to call, and Dasein instead can only make itself ready for the call. The call requires both Dasein and more than Dasein.

Although Heidegger's formulation of the call of conscience may seem obscure and removed from everyday life, Heidegger is adamant that the call of conscience is only actualized through experiences. In particular, he explains the call of conscience exists only as resolute choice. Heidegger asserts, "[r]esoluteness 'exists' only as a resolution" (*BT* [MR] 345/*SZ* 298). Dasein must enact resoluteness in actual decisions in specific contexts. However, this does not mean that resolute choice involves taking action or behaving in a particular way. Yet resolute choice is also not a theoretical conception or the thinking of some idea. In addition, resolute choice should not be understood as a heroic, stoic hardening oneself against death (Dastur 42). Furthermore, resolute choice is specific to the individual Dasein and not universal.

4. Anticipatory Resoluteness Opens Possibilities of Life

Instead, resolute choice is Dasein's demonstrated potentiality of being. In order to elucidate what this means, it is necessary to note that Heidegger sees resoluteness and running ahead/anticipation as fundamentally connected. Indeed, Heidegger oftentimes refers to the two together as "anticipatory resoluteness." In placing them together, one can understand authentic being-towards-death as involving an embracing of oneself as a being-in-the-world that is being-towards-death. And it is through this apprehending oneself as this unique, mortal Dasein that an individual is able to determine him or herself and make a resolute choice. Heidegger states, "The more authentically Dasein resolves- and this means that in anticipating death it understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost distinctive possibility- the more unequivocally does it choose and find the possibility of its existence" (*BT* [MR] 435/*SZ* 384). Anticipatory resoluteness involves apprehending oneself

as a being-towards-death and making choices from out of this authentic self-understanding. Said differently, resolute choice is the taking up of one's being as a unique Dasein who is being-towards-death, and concretely 'acting' from out of this most extreme possibility of death. Heidegger illustrates anticipatory resoluteness "makes it possible for Dasein to be able to take over resolutely that entity which it already is" (*BT* [MR] 388/*SZ* 339). Ireton clarifies that anticipatory resoluteness is Dasein's "unlocking of itself […] into an act of self-disclosure that allows for a firm seizure of existence" (275). Anticipatory resoluteness is a grasping of one's finitude in order to take hold of one's life. As such, resolute choice is a demonstrated potentiality of being in that it is the attestation of authentic being-towards-death, embracing the possibility of death in that it is opens up the possibilities of life. Therefore, authentic being-towards-death does not just maintain death as a possibility, but opens up and maintains all possibilities of Dasein. In this way, Heidegger understands authentic being-towards-death as the medium to authentic being-in-the-world in general. In total, making oneself ready for the silent call of conscience frees Dasein for the possibility of anxiously resolutely running ahead authentically into one's being-towards-death, which opens Dasein forward into its possibilities in life.

Moreover, when Dasein is authentic, it encourages other Daseins to free themselves from The They and embrace their own possibilities as well. Heidegger asserts, "Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it 'be' in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates" (*BT* [MR] 344/*SZ* 298). That is, Heidegger believes that an authentic Dasein will incite others to also authentically be. It is important to remember, however, that Heidegger is not directly prescribing authenticity, but is rather

exposing an alternative way of understanding ourselves and relating to our death. Although it is sounds like Heidegger is suggesting authenticity as beneficial in that it encourages others to also be authentic, Heidegger does not want to make the claim that authenticity is any better than inauthenticity.

6. Possibility of Authenticity through Anxious Anticipatory Resoluteness

To summarize, because of the unique being that we are, we have a tendency to have an inauthentic self-understanding in our everyday being-in-the-world. However, also because of the being that we are, we have the possibility to authentically understand ourselves as being-towards-death. Inauthentic being-towards-death is fleeing death as the most extreme possibility that it is. Authentic being-towards-death is embracing anxiety and resolutely running forward into the possibility of death. This authentic relation to our finitude is the portal to authentic being-in-the-world in general. Authentically being-towards our death, through anxious anticipatory resoluteness, has an affect on both our life and the lives of others around us.

Through his description of anxious anticipatory resoluteness, Heidegger goes beyond Ariès, Becker, and TMT in proposing a way in which we can authentically relate to our death. However, Heidegger's terminology seems to obscure the meaning of authentic being-towards-death. In other words, while a reader can describe what "anxiety," "anticipation," and "resoluteness" mean to Heidegger, it is incredibly challenging to grasp how they manifest within our everyday lives. What does anticipation and running ahead into death actually look like? How would a person know if they are making resolute choices? Heidegger does not explain in concrete experiential terms how to authentically be-

towards-death. Therefore, even though Heidegger pushes the conversation of death in life to more fundamental and deeper levels than the previously discussed social scientists, Heidegger's philosophizing still does not clarify how death can be approached, related to, and understood in our everyday lives.[15]

IV. Potential Reasons for Lack of Concrete Explanation of Authentic Being-towards-Death

A. Not a Straightforward Choice

However, because Heidegger is so rigorous with his philosophizing, it is important to take seriously the possible reasons why Heidegger did not experientially illustrate how Dasein can authentically be-towards-death. In other words, because Heidegger carefully analyzed the different relations we can take toward death, it is possible Heidegger has valid and purposeful reasons for not fully revealing the way in which to authentically apprehend death in our everyday lives. Perhaps through considering potential reasons for Heidegger's lack of clarity, authentic being-towards-death can be further elucidated.

One reason why Heidegger may not describe how to experientially accomplish authentic being-towards-death is because he does not conceive of the modes of self-understanding and relating to our death as a straightforward choice. Because Dasein as a being-in-the-world *is* its relations with other Daseins, things, and the world, Dasein does not straightforwardly have fate or free will. Indeed, Heidegger sometimes uses scare quotes around the word choice, which makes it seem that one cannot choose to be authentic in the full sense of the term. In addition, as previously explained, the call of conscience, which is necessary to authentically be-towards-death, comes from both Dasein itself and over and above Dasein. As a result, Dasein cannot command the call to come, and can only make

itself ready for the call. Therefore, because Dasein cannot straightforwardly choose authenticity, it would be incongruous for Heidegger to fully define the ways Dasein can choose to be authentic.

B. Transforms and Changes

Another possible reason why Heidegger does not concretely describe authentic being-towards-death is because authenticity must be regained ever anew. When Dasein is authentically being-towards-death this does not mean that Dasein has reached a type of permanent enlightenment. Instead, Heidegger describes there is a continuous oscillation between inauthenticity and authenticity. Because inauthenticity is an ontological constitution of Dasein, Dasein is always at risk of becoming inauthentic. That is, Dasein cannot forevermore sustain a continuous marathon of authentic resolutely running forward and inevitably falls back into The They and inauthenticity. As a result, when Dasein embraces an authentic being-towards-death, it is always a re-emerging into authenticity. Considering that authenticity must be gained again and again, it is likely the ways in which to become authentic are constantly changing and transforming. Therefore, authenticity is not a set path that Heidegger would ever be able to describe.

C. Complexly Intertwined with Inauthenticity

To further complicate matters, Heidegger explains that authenticity is not wholly separated from inauthenticity. Heidegger states, "In anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein *holds* itself open for its constant lostness in the irresoluteness of the 'they'- a lostness which is possible from the very basis of its own Being" (*BT* [MR] 356/*SZ* 308). Because authenticity

involves embracing the being that one is, and because inauthenticity is a part of the being one is, then authenticity is not completely void of inauthenticity. Because authenticity is not transcendent beyond one's everyday existence, and seems to be fundamentally intertwined with inauthenticity, it becomes incredibly challenge to grasp, let alone communicate, what authenticity concretely entails.

D. Not Superior to Inauthentic Being-towards-Death

Another explanation for why Heidegger does not fully illustrate how one reaches authenticity is because he does not want to prioritize authenticity over inauthenticity. Heidegger is adamant that inauthenticity is not bad and problematic and authenticity is not good and a solution, although it is hard to avoid this impression. Inauthenticity and authenticity are just types of relations to our death, different ways of self-understanding we experience. Heidegger is not dictating a particular way of life, but pointing out Dasein's possible modes of being. Therefore, perhaps Heidegger does not describe concrete ways to anxiously anticipate one's being-towards-death in order to prevent the reader from thinking he is prescribing authenticity.

E. Must Be Enacted By Oneself

An additional plausible reason why Heidegger does not explain how to anxiously anticipate one's death is because any instruction for how to reach authenticity would go against its very definition. Because authenticity fundamentally involves owning oneself, determining oneself in contrast to falling prey to The They, then Dasein must embrace its being on its own. If Heidegger were to clearly and explicitly describe the steps in which to

anxiously anticipate being-towards-death, and the reader were to follow these words, the reader would be losing himself or herself to the preconceived ways The They decides. In other words, if Heidegger tells Dasein how to be authentic, then he disables Dasein from authentically owning and determining itself.

VI. Heidegger's Relation to Ariès, Becker, and TMT

A. Similarities to the Social Scientists

Now that a basic explanation of Heidegger's conception of being-towards-death has been described, it is possible to examine how Heidegger's formulation of our mortality relates to those of the previously discussed social scientists. Ariès, Becker, TMT, and Heidegger agree that people, at least in contemporary times, typically deny death. Heidegger elucidates this concept with his explanation of our tendency of an inauthentic being-towards-death.

Furthermore, all of the thinkers thus far discussed argue that, more than any other aspect of our lives, the way in which we relate to our death has a central influence on us. In particular, Heidegger understands authentic being-towards-death as the portal to authenticity in general. While Heidegger does not prescribe authenticity, he does believe that authenticity impacts our lives. Therefore, much like how Ariès, Becker, and TMT argue death greatly influences our everyday experiences, Heidegger asserts the way in which we understand ourselves as being-towards-death affects our day-to-day existence.

A more specific similarity between Heidegger and Becker is their understanding that our denial of death manifests through our interactions. Becker explains that through our societal interactions we come to deny our death in an adoption of a cultural heroic

system. Comparatively, Heidegger describes that a denial of death occurs in our interactions with other beings, such as when we fall prey in the idle talk of The They and when we preoccupy ourselves with things that surround us. Moreover, Becker and Heidegger both view this denial of death as a paradoxical attempt to gain freedom from the anxiety of our death by imprisoning ourselves in the pre-made decisions of the public.

An additional similarity between Heidegger and Becker is in how they propose the appealing way[16] in which to relate to our death. Becker promotes the religious solution and Heidegger describes authentic being-towards-death. While fundamentally quite different, Becker and Heidegger use similar language to describe the mechanism to reach this appealing approach to death. In particular, Becker uses the phrase "*leap* of faith" and Heidegger uses "*forward running* resoluteness." In this way, both thinkers illustrate the appealing way to confront mortality through a bodily metaphor that implies a harsh, urgent movement in a forward direction. In addition, both Becker and Heidegger do not fully and concretely describe what the appealing relation to our death looks like in our everyday lives. While Becker's definition of the religious solution is highly contradictory and confusing, Heidegger's description of anxious resolute running ahead is incredibly challenging to grasp in an experiential way. Therefore, both Becker and Heidegger are similar in that they remain obscure in their explanation of the appealing way to approach our mortality.

B. Differences with the Social Scientists

A major difference between Heidegger and Becker is how they formulate the appealing way to relate to our death. In particular, Becker thinks the appealing way to

approach death still involves a denial in that he views the religious solution as the *best* way to deny our mortality. In contrast, Heidegger describes authentic being-towards-death as a grasping and maintaining death as the possibility that it is. In this way, Heidegger believes that we are indeed capable of not denying our death. Nevertheless, Heidegger makes clear that authentic being-towards-death is not an absolute state of enlightenment, and Dasein will always inevitably fall back into inauthenticity. As a result, Heidegger does seem to agree with Becker that a denial of death is impossible to completely eradicate. Still, Heidegger seems more hopeful than Becker in his belief that we can actually confront and apprehend our being-towards-death.

Another crucial difference between Heidegger and Becker is that Heidegger is adamant that the appealing way to approach death is not transcendent beyond this world. Heidegger understands authentic being-towards-death as apprehending the being one is, a being-in-the-world fundamentally connected to this world and other beings. Therefore, authentic being-towards-death does not involve removing oneself from its interactions with things and others. In contrast, Becker's promotion of the religious solution involves a transcendent leap of faith. While Becker is unclear what he means by leap of faith, it seems Becker suggests the appealing way to approach our death is by moving beyond this realm and connecting with God. As a result, Becker understands the appealing way to relate to our death is through transcending whereas Heidegger understands it as necessarily connected to our everyday lives in this world.

An additional difference between Heidegger and Becker is how they view their subject of investigation. Heidegger, like Becker, sees our tendency to deny our death as an aspect of who we are. However, Heidegger is speaking only about Dasein, our being-in-the-

world, and does not want to make claims about a universal human nature as Becker seems to do. That is, even though Heidegger believes our tendency to inauthentically relate to our death is a part of *our* ontological constitution, Heidegger, unlike Becker, does not propose that this is a permanent characteristic of human beings.

Still another discrepancy between Heidegger and the social scientists is that they seem to have different meanings for the term death. Heidegger tries to clearly define what he signifies by death, a being-towards-death distinct from demise, perishing, and dying. However, Ariès, Becker, and TMT do not directly explain what they mean by death, and presuppose their readers understand what they are referencing. For example, TMT rests their entire experimental framework on Mortality Salience, or priming someone with awareness of their death. However, Heidegger's careful definitions expose the indeterminacy of what exactly TMT experiments are priming. It seems likely TMT researchers are investigating both demise and dying, and are thus not examining how people confront being-towards-death. As a result, it appears that Heidegger and TMT are investigating different phenomenon. As previously alluded to in Derrida's criticism of the social scientific view of death, Heidegger's work underlines the importance of the social sciences to reconsider what exactly they are studying. Nevertheless, it is of significance that despite this major incongruence in what they mean by death, both Heidegger and the social sciences seem to uncover the pervasive impact of 'death' in our everyday lives.

C. Contributions and Limitations

In sum, Heidegger uses rigorous ontological phenomenology in order to reaffirm what Ariès, Becker, and TMT generally think about our mortality. Heidegger is also able to

go beyond these thinkers in his ability to elucidate possible ways to confront our death. While Becker confusingly tries to explain different relations to our death, Heidegger does so with careful precision. Additionally, Heidegger goes farther than Becker and TMT in his proposition that it is possible to not always deny our death. Heidegger describes an authentic being-towards-death involves confronting and facing death as the possibility that it is. Heidegger contributes a great deal to the conversation about death in life, both in pushing the meticulousness of the concept of death and in advancing descriptions of possible ways to approach death.

However, despite, or precisely because of, the carefulness of his philosophizing, Heidegger is limited in his ability to tangibly explain what death means to my everyday life. As previously explained, Ariès, Becker, and TMT remain bound within their disciplines and are unable to describe potential ways to approach our death. Heidegger similarly is confined by his ultraprecise system and his quasi-scientific terminology, which are incredibly difficult for readers to comprehend. While he unfolds the intricacies of an authentic being-towards-death as involving anxiously resolutely running forward, the reader is left not knowing how this relation to death can concretely manifest within their day-to-day existence. Heidegger's philosophizing on death provides clarity, but because of its explicitly ontological approach, it remains within a realm of abstract cognition instead of illuminating lived experience. No thinker thus far discussed has been able to explain the ways in which we can approach our death in a manner that can be embodied and truly apprehended. As a result, the next chapter of this thesis examines Friedrich Nietzsche's more personal methodology in the quest to unfold the ways in which I can comprehend and integrate my death in life.

Chapter Five: Friedrich Nietzsche, Philosophical Therapist: Embodiment of Death

I. Introduction to Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is traditionally considered a philosopher, but his project can be seen in a different light, as that of a "cultural physician."[17] Nietzsche's major aim was to doctor the sickness of modern society, and in this way could be considered a macro-psychotherapist. In *Ecce Homo* he asserts, "The fact that a *psychologist* without equal is speaking in my works, this is perhaps the first thing a good reader will realize" (*EH,* "Books" 105 §5). Instead of elucidating specific philosophical content, Nietzsche provided a form of therapy, a methodology in order to have his readers embody a process to grow into a stronger way of living. Nietzsche's central philosophical task was assisting *you* to *become* healthier.

Fundamental to Nietzsche's project was the attempt to get you, as an individual reader, to realize that your beliefs were not set in stone. His philosophy was one of provocation, and he often wrote in ways that opposed the prevailing tradition. Nietzsche purposefully tried to chide his readers in order to ruffle their conventional ways and uproot them from their habitual tranquility. In addition, he wrote to be confusing and contradictory, often employing poetic techniques such as metaphors, imagery, and symbolism. Nietzsche did not want to present straightforward ideas. Similarly, instead of wrapping up his writings with tidy conclusions, Nietzsche tried to open up the content even more. For example, Nietzsche oftentimes finished his aphorisms with a question mark or dash instead of a period. Through both what he said and how he said it, Nietzsche jostled his readers' ideas to awaken them to the fact that their conceptions are not absolute, and that they have the agency to create different formulations.

Through undermining the foundational beliefs of his readers, Nietzsche was trying to get them to question whether their current understandings were detrimental or beneficial to their life. Indeed, this could be described as Nietzsche's task—the investigation into what is in the service of life. If, after questioning, the reader's conceptions were shown to be detrimental to their life, Nietzsche encouraged the reader to create other, stronger conceptions. His open-ended, poetic methodology was meant to get his readers to re-imbue their own meaning regarding the issue at hand. For example, David Allison, a scholar who works on Nietzsche and psychoanalysis, explains that Nietzsche often used an aphoristic approach because through this process the readers "have to actively and seriously engage themselves – by personally interpreting the aphorism" (xi). In contrast to declaring a philosophical postulation to no one in particular, Allison describes that Nietzsche intimately talks to his readers as if they are his friends, speaking specifically to you as you process his works (xii). Much like conversation with a friend, Nietzsche offers disjointed, open-ended insights, so his readers must come to their own conclusions as to the importance and significance of the concept raised. In this way, Nietzsche's philosophy is a form of therapy, one that aims to get the reader to realize the sickness in wholeheartedly, absolutely believing their cultural system, and an encouragement and helpful therapeutic hand to push the reader towards constructing a new, ever healthier system for themself.

Because Nietzsche is a therapist of culture, he was not necessarily aiming to get his readers to rationally, cognitively think certain things. Rather, Nietzsche cares about how his readers feel, how they exist and experience their world. Heidegger too wanted to expose his readers to other potential ways to be. However, Heidegger, unlike Nietzsche, used a rigorous, logical approach to accomplish this task. Heidegger unfolded an intricate

philosophical system that one has to spend a great deal of effort trying to unpack and rationally clarify. In contrast, Nietzsche used contradictory, paradoxical content in order to have his readers undergo an emotional, creative process as they read his works. Nietzsche never writes straightforwardly, so his readers will never be able to fully grasp exactly and in detail what Nietzsche means. Therefore, Nietzsche wants you to undergo an experimental, interpretative process in contrast to Heidegger who takes the reader on a path to understand a particular formulation.

The different styles of Heidegger and Nietzsche become especially clear when examining how they approach the theme of death. As we have seen, Heidegger carefully and rigorously elucidates a detailed definition of death and the modes in which we can relate to our mortality. In doing so, Heidegger remedies the presuppositions of the social sciences in their assumption that death means the end moment of one's life, and he supplements the social sciences' lack of or unclear descriptions of potential ways in which to approach our finitude. However, this concentration on analyzing death restricts Heidegger. While his readers conceptually come to understand that they are being-towards-death, they are left not knowing what this means to their everyday existence. Even though Heidegger explains an authentic relation towards our death as involving an anxious running ahead resolute choice, his readers may have difficulty grasping how they can actualize this relation to their mortality within their own lives.

In contrast to Heidegger's intense concentration on clarifying death, Nietzsche rarely directly spoke about death. When one considers his emphasis on embodiment, this silence does not seem unfitting. Nietzsche says, "Being – we have no idea of it apart from the idea of 'living.' – How can anything dead 'be'?" (*WP* 312 §582). Through this quote,

Nietzsche questions how it is possible to wrap our minds around death. Considering that we are alive, we are unable to experientially know what death is. Because we cannot know what death is, Nietzsche does not want to directly investigate death. Instead, we are able to confront our finitude through indirect avenues, ways in which mortality experientially shows itself within our everyday lives.

This chapter looks at two ways in which Nietzsche indirectly examines the different modes in which we can approach our mortality. First, we will look at the various aphorisms where Nietzsche discusses his views on suicide. Then, we will describe Nietzsche's formulation of sickness, as his take on how we confront our mortality through the fallibility of our bodies.

II. Suicide

A. Upturning Traditional Notions That Suicide Is Problematic

Nietzsche's most direct discussion of death involves the concept of suicide. For the most part, Nietzsche seems to be an adamant proponent of killing oneself. For example, he states, "Out of love for *life* -, you should want death to be different, free, conscious, without chance, without surprises […] When you *do away with* yourself you are doing the most admirable thing there is" (*TI*, "Untimely" 210 §36). In contemporary society, even the morality of suicide in the case of terminal illness is highly debated. Therefore, from the perspective of current mainstream values, Nietzsche's general advocacy of suicide would likely seem radical and outrageous.

However, perhaps this is precisely the point. It is possible Nietzsche is promoting suicide in the same way he tries to constantly uproot all of modern society's declaration of

absolute values. Nietzsche oftentimes tries to expose that what we deem as fundamental, natural principles could actually be conceptualized otherwise. In this way, Nietzsche's promotion of suicide could be seen as an attempt to expose that the manner in which we currently evaluate suicide is not immutable, and thus that suicide is not necessarily a horrible, evil phenomenon.

One way in which Nietzsche shows our views could be otherwise is through his explanation that Christianity is what has deemed suicide in our contemporary times as absolutely negative. Nietzsche claims that Christianity has convinced society that all suicide or "unnatural death" is terrible and bad and all "natural death" or dying of old age and weakness is praiseworthy. However, Nietzsche asserts that outside of the religious mode, "natural death is worthy of no glorification" (*HH,* "Wanderer" 355 §185). Through pointing out that there is a history to the conception of suicide and suggesting there are other ways besides the Christian way in which to evaluate types of death, Nietzsche exposes that it is possible to understand death differently than we do now.

Another way in which Nietzsche reveals the changeability of our evaluation of suicide is through his explanation that the way we experience death psychologically is not always as it seems socially. Nietzsche states, "He who is honest usually feels when someone dies that he has really been deprived of very little and that the solemn funeral orator is a hypocrite" (*HH,* "Opinions" 295 §373). In other words, Nietzsche seems to be saying that even though we create a lot of fuss and drama when a person dies, we do not actually feel as affected as we may claim we are. In this way, Nietzsche suggests that death, including suicide, might not be as horrendous as we outwardly make it out to be. It is thus possible we could evaluate suicide positively, and that it is likely we already do.

Therefore, it seems that one reason why Nietzsche promotes, or at least does not proscribe, suicide is because he is trying to oppose the absolute notion that suicide is bad and horrific. It seems clear that Nietzsche at the very least is trying to get us to question our traditional conception that dying at an old age of natural causes, such as weakness and degeneration, is glorious and killing ourselves in our prime is misguided and pathological. Corresponding to his philosophy at large, Nietzsche wants us to understand the impermanence of our conceptions, including how we perceive death, and to ask if other ways of conceptualizing and being may be healthier.

B. Potential Benefits of Suicide

A different but not incongruous reason for why Nietzsche promotes suicide could be that he does in fact believe suicide is beneficial. Nietzsche discusses his opinions regarding suicide with a great deal of confidence, which makes it seem as if he is not just promoting suicide to oppose traditional notions, but because he truly views it as praiseworthy and in the service of life. For example, he questions, "What is more rational, to stop the machine when the work one demands of it has been completed – or to let it run on until it stops of its own accord, that is to say until it is ruined? Is the latter not a squandering of the cost of maintenance, a misuse of the energy and attentiveness of those who service it?" (*HH,* "Wanderer" 355 §185). Here Nietzsche seems to be going beyond his method of passionate, antagonism of traditional notions to provide a rational argument why suicide is potentially commendable. Nietzsche is able to explain that much like machinery, it does not make logical sense to continue living when one is unable of functioning efficiently. Therefore, it

seems that Nietzsche might not merely be trying to frustrate his readers' habitual conceptions, but that philosophically he understands suicide to be of benefit.

Whether he is simply trying to overturn traditional notions or whether he is making a philosophical claim, with these aphorisms Nietzsche suggests that suicide might in fact be in the service of life. Therefore, it can be surmised that on a more general level Nietzsche does not believe death straightforwardly opposes life, but that death could actually potentially enhance and affirm life.

C. Opposition to Degenerative Slow Suicide

However, even though Nietzsche does indeed support suicide in many of his aphorisms, elsewhere he appears to fervently oppose it. That is, Nietzsche seems to be contradictorily both for and against the act of killing oneself. Yet, a careful examination of the aphorisms together makes it clear that Nietzsche uses the term 'suicide' in two ways, differentiated by how they relate to life. Specifically, Nietzsche promotes suicide when it affirms life, as in the examples above, and he opposes suicide when it is against life.

Certain types of suicide involve a hatred or degeneration of life, and this is the type of killing oneself that Nietzsche condemns. Nietzsche calls this negative killing of oneself "slow suicide," which involves the killing oneself throughout the course of one's life. Nietzsche understands Christianity as a prime example of a slow suicide in that it denies this life in its desire not to live in this world. Christianity believes in a heaven realm, a beyond they view as the true, eternal existence. A person must die in order to reach this perfect realm, and thus, Nietzsche understands Christianity as preaching death (see *Z,* "Preachers" 72).

Another detrimental suicide Nietzsche condemns is that of Socrates (*GS* 272 §340). While Nietzsche respected Socrates, he was disappointed and deeply upset with the way Socrates approached his death. Nietzsche explains that Socrates' last words of "O Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster" actually mean, "O Crito, *life is a disease.*" Walter Kaufmann, an influential scholar of Nietzsche, points out that because Asclepius was the god of medicine, through this aphorism Nietzsche understands that Socrates' viewed his suicide as a cure of the disease of life (*GS* 272 Note 70). In this way, "Socrates *suffered life!*," and he rationalized his suicide by declaring a hatred of life. Nietzsche understands this final move by Socrates as undermining what Nietzsche initially believed to be an overarching cheerfulness in Socrates' work. In other words, the reason Socrates gave for his suicide showed Nietzsche that Socrates' entire existence was a slow degeneration and opposition to life. The examples of Christianity and Socrates involve being so disgusted with life that they try to escape it by promoting death, a suicide Nietzsche opposes because it is life denying.

D. Promotion of Affirmative Suicide

In contrast to the slow suicide that involves a condemnation of life, the suicide Nietzsche promotes requires an affirmation of life. Nietzsche champions one who is, "Free for death and free in death, one who solemnly says No when there is no longer time for Yes: thus he understands life and death" (*Z,* "Voluntary" 99). That is, Nietzsche promotes saying "No" or ending life when a person is no longer able to say "Yes" and affirm their life. Another way Nietzsche advocates suicide is through his encouragement of, "Dying proudly when it is not longer feasible to live proudly" (*TI,* "Untimely" 210 §36). Nietzsche recommends killing oneself when it becomes the final act of affirmation, even when this

means killing oneself before one becomes old or falls ill. Ireton clarifies Nietzsche's position when he says, "Eventually even self-transcendence has its limits and it is then that death, paradoxically, becomes the only existential possibility for further growth" (162). When a person is unable to become more than what they are, cannot take hold of new possibilities, and thus cannot truly live, Nietzsche believes that at this point suicide is the most praiseworthy decision this individual can make. In this way, one honors life by stopping a life of non-living.

However, Nietzsche describes affirmative suicide as incredibly challenging. It is a major struggle to know when it is the "right time" to die (*Z,* "Voluntary" 98). That is, it is difficult to pinpoint when it is that death affirms life and when it denies life. In addition, Nietzsche asserts suicide must be done as a rational, thoughtful decision, and not in the depths of brooding, passionate despair. Besides performing the act itself, and doing so at the right time, Nietzsche's affirmative suicide must also be "carried out with lucidity and cheerfulness" (*TI,* "Untimely" 210 §36).

Considering Nietzsche believes that one should kill themselves when they are no longer truly living, Nietzsche also argues that people who preach slow suicide, who kill themselves by denying their life, should commit suicide because they are no longer truly living. For example, he states, "Everywhere resound the voices of those who preach death […] Or 'eternal life': it is all the same to me — provided they pass away quickly!" (*Z,* "Preachers" 73). Nietzsche understands those who "preach death" as people who hate life, exemplified by Christianity and Socrates. In this aphorism, Nietzsche seems to be saying that he wants these preachers of slow suicide to hurry up and kill themselves. In this way,

we can see Nietzsche understands that a suicide committed rationally and affirmatively is superior to a 'life' that is a dull, tranquilized, slow suicide.

For Nietzsche, the opposition is not between death and life, but, rather, the opposition between affirming life and denying life (see *EH,* "Birth" 109 §2). Thus Nietzsche warns, "Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life" (*GS* 168 §109). As a result, it becomes clear Nietzsche does not have paradoxical opinions regarding suicide. Because Nietzsche views the opposition of life as the opposite to life, he champions suicide when it is a promotion of life and opposes suicide when it involves a fleeing from and degeneration of life.

In line with these views he states, "It makes me happy that men do not want at all to think the thought of death! I should like very much to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them" (*GS* 225 §278). Here Nietzsche is encouraging that we focus on the question of what is in the service of life. In the right circumstances, death is seen as an affirmation of and not an opposition to life. Nietzsche, similar to Heidegger, is not concerned with investigating how death is different than life, but about how we *live* in relation to our death. What matters for Nietzsche is that we learn the courage and cheerfulness to affirmatively embrace every moment of our lives, including an act of suicide when a person can no longer affirm their existence.

E. Suicide as Both Physical and Metaphorical

As has been alluded to thus far, Nietzsche's formulation of suicide can be interpreted as a physical killing oneself, but it can also be viewed in a metaphorical way. People can kill themselves metaphorically by destroying their previous, set conceptions in order to learn

new, more beneficial ways. Metaphorical suicide involves the overturning of one's traditional notions, which as described above, is the aim of the provocative method Nietzsche often employs in his writings. This broader understanding of death can be seen in Nietzsche's declaration, "I love him who wants to create beyond himself, and thus perishes" (*Z,* "Creator" 91). Here Nietzsche is pointing out that every creation necessitates the killing of what formerly was, in order to build anew. Thus, creative endeavors involve a suicide of one's previous way of being. Another example of this metaphorical understanding of death occurs in Nietzsche's exclamation that: "[the living] sometimes appear to me as shades, so pale and ill-humored, so restless and, alas! So lusting for life: whereas those others then seem to me so alive, as though now, *after* death, they could never again grow weary of life" (*HH,* "Opinions" 299 §408). In this aphorism, those who have "died" have not perished in the physical sense, but have undergone a metaphorical dying, an overturning of their previous ways. These "dead," Nietzsche asserts, are more alive, more full of color, exuberance, and liveliness, than those who have lived their lives grumbling, feeble, and with a lack of engagement. Nietzsche understands a metaphorical dying as a way of being truly alive.

Ireton finds Nietzsche's more metaphorical understanding of death at work in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* At one point, Zarathustra, the main character, promotes a free death (i.e. affirmative suicide), and Ireton claims that this promotion of free death should perhaps "be understood not as an actual and definitive killing of the self but as a projected end meant to further the freedom of existence and increase the potential of life. Free death results as a consequence of one's entire mode of existence and denotes more a life-long attitude than a singular act of suicide" (172). Ireton believes that instead of just a promotion of physically

killing oneself, Nietzsche, through his character of Zarathustra, encourages suicide as a destruction of one's previous self throughout the entire course of one's life. In other words, it seems that Nietzsche's affirmative suicide involves a continuous annihilation of detrimental ways of being, which enables a person to create and re-create healthier, stronger forms of existence.

Another way Nietzsche's understanding of death can be viewed as having both a physical and metaphorical meaning is in his claim that what matters is how a person views death when they are at the peak of their lives. Nietzsche states, "The whole way in which a person thinks of death during the high tide of his life and strength bears, to be sure, very eloquent witness as to that which is called his character; but the hour of death itself, his bearing on the deathbed, hardly does so at all" (*HH,* "Opinions" 231 §884). Within this aphorism, Nietzsche explains that contrary to popular belief the dying are not especially honest or strong. Nietzsche describes the altered states of physiology and pain involved in dying usually result in behavior distorted by fear and vanity. Through this explanation, Nietzsche exposes that the moment of demise is not a glorious, culminating point in an individual's life, that it does not matter the way in which someone faces death on their deathbed. Rather, what is more telling about a person's character is how one approaches death when they are at the highest, strongest point in their life. However, it is left open for interpretation whether Nietzsche means a physical, a metaphorical, or both a physical and metaphorical death at the peak of life. Regardless, here again Nietzsche seems to suggest that death is beyond just a physical phenomenon.

F. Multi-Level Understandings of Suicide

Because Nietzsche purposefully writes in a confusing and seemingly contradictory manner, it could appear upon first glance that Nietzsche's interpretations of suicide are incongruous. However, through examining his aphorisms closely, Nietzsche does seem to be making specific claims about suicide, which help to shed light on how he views death more generally. In particular, it has been shown that Nietzsche is both for and against suicide, depending on if suicide is in the service of life, and he refers to suicide both as a physical and metaphorical act. In this way, Nietzsche uses the term "suicide" to suggest multiple levels of meaning. Perhaps, as Allison describes, Nietzsche wrote with multi-level meaning in order to cater the same words to different audiences (78). It also seems likely that Nietzsche wrote about suicide in multiple layers because he did not see a clear dichotomy between the physical and the metaphorical. Therefore, perhaps Nietzsche meant to champion affirmative physical *and* metaphorical suicide at the same time. Even though Nietzsche does not explicitly define his viewpoint on suicide, he does clearly encourage agency over one's death, physically and metaphorically, in order to both overturn traditional notions and affirm life. Furthermore, in his aphorisms about suicide, it is also apparent that Nietzsche does not view the opposite of life as death, but as not truly living, as tranquilizing and decaying life in a slow wasteful suicide.

III. Convalescing

A. Sickness as 'Experiencing' Death within Life

Another way in which Nietzsche's understanding of death can be indirectly accessed is through his formulation of sickness. At some point in each of our lives, we will experience a physical ailment during which we will be forced into the awareness that we are restricted

by our fallible, mortal bodies. In sickness, we encounter the fact that we do not have total control over our temporary existence. Therefore, sickness is a way in which we experientially must confront our mortality within our everyday lives.

Nietzsche was himself plagued with horrible periods of disabling illness throughout his life (Allison 9). He had paralyzing migraines that lasted for days, ceaseless digestive issues, dizziness, vision problems, and was frequently unable to get out of bed. Although Nietzsche underwent so many bodily terrors, he wrote fifteen books in addition to other essays and unpublished works. Even more, he vigorously praised his sickness. Nietzsche proclaims, "I have never felt as happy with myself as I was in the sickest and most painful times of my life" (*EH,* "Human" 119 §4). Similarly he professes, "at the very bottom of my soul I feel grateful to all my misery and bouts of sickness and everything about me that is imperfect" (*GS* 237 §295). Nietzsche understood his personal sicknesses to be so crucial to his philosophy, that he recommends his readers "pay careful attention" to his lowest years (*EH,* "Wise" 76 §2).

Considering the importance Nietzsche places on investigating only the aspects of our existence that we experience, and because sickness was personally something he experienced his entire life, Nietzsche understood sickness as a central topic in his philosophical project. Through unpacking his understanding of sickness, and subsequently his formulation of health, we can shed further light on how Nietzsche conceptualizes death in life.

B. Overturning Traditional Notion That Sickness Is Problematic

Similar to his promotion of suicide, Nietzsche's valorization of sickness opposes traditional notions. It seems commonsensical that we should avoid pain and strive for pleasure. It seems obvious that we should try to prevent, diminish, or fix anything harmful. The conventional idea that pain should be avoided manifests through the modern terms used to describe deviant perspectives. The word 'masochist' describes someone who enjoys experiencing pain, and the adjective 'depressed' signifies someone who overly ruminates on negative experiences. It is possible a contemporary Western person would, at least upon first glance, understand Nietzsche as having both of these abnormal viewpoints. In our current society, Nietzsche's appreciation for and concentration on pain might even be considered psychologically unhealthy and warranting of intervening help.

Yet Nietzsche asserts that our current negative evaluation of pain has not always been the way in which suffering has been conceptualized. Nietzsche describes that before the comforts of modernity, in what he calls the "age of fear," it was beneficial for people to learn how to endure pain and suffering. He says, "In those days, one received ample training in bodily torments and deprivations and one understood even a certain cruelty against oneself and a voluntary habituation to pain as a necessary means of self-preservation" (*GS* 112 §48). A person in the "age of fear" was directly educated on how to embrace and utilize their sufferings as a means of survival. However, Nietzsche claims that "pain is now hated much more than was the case formerly; one speaks much worse of it" (*GS* 113 §48). Nietzsche uses the word "now" in order to reference that contemporary society has a more contemptuous viewpoint on pain than in the "age of fear" of previous societies.

In contemporary society the former acceptance of pain has somehow completely reversed, and "the mere *thought* of pain [is] scarcely endurable" (*GS* 113 §48). Instead of learning how to productively harness the advantages of suffering like previous societies, people nowadays reject and flee from all forms suffering. Modern society now becomes 'sick' with any thought of sickness. Through his genealogical illustration that we have not always adamantly rejected all suffering as we do now, Nietzsche exposes that we do not have to, and maybe should not, deny these painful parts of living. It is important to point out that this is the same tactic Nietzsche used to explain that suicide has not always been thought of detrimentally.[18] Nietzsche oftentimes traces the history of a valuation in order to reveal that the value is not natural and absolute even though it seems to be, to question if our current perspective is advantageous, and to awaken us to the fact that we can alter our conceptions.

C. Opposition to Negative Valuations of Sickness

In fact, Nietzsche goes farther than just doubting and disagreeing with the present perspective of pain, he wholeheartedly asserts that this contemporary viewpoint is incredibly harmful. He states, "[T]he worst sickness of mankind originated in the way in which they [combat] their sicknesses, and what seemed to cure has in the long run produced something worse than that which it was supposed to overcome" (*D* 33 §52). With this aphorism, Nietzsche claims that there are much more serious problems that erupt from our contempt and rejection of our suffering than from the experience of suffering itself. In other words, it is not sickness that is against life, but, rather, our current negative valuation

of sickness that is against life. Nietzsche views the 'cures' invented in attempt to remove pain from our lives as dangerous diseases.

Two of the 'cures' of contemporary society that Nietzsche sees as the most life threatening are Christianity[19] and the history of philosophy.[20] In essence, Nietzsche illustrates that Christianity and the history of philosophy aim to 'heal' by completely removing all sickness, pain, and suffering through promoting a hatred of and escape from pain that occurs in this body and world.

In particular, Nietzsche was disgusted by the way in which Christianity preaches the body as inherently sinful. He asserts that Christianity makes "necessary and regularly recurring sensations into a source of inner misery" (*D* 45 §76). By defining bodily expressions that are required for survival, such as sexuality, as wicked and evil, a person comes to feel guilt, shame, and self-hatred for their natural human urges. As a result, Nietzsche argues Christianity encourages people to reduce, diminish, and decrease aspects of who they are, and in particular, the parts of them that affirm their life.

Nietzsche also sees much of the history of philosophy as involving a contempt for the body, and is thus fundamentally "a *misunderstanding of the body"* (*GS,* "Preface" 35 §2). Throughout the history of philosophy, thinkers have understood bodily sensations and perceptions as erroneous. They claim that our bodies "'[deceive] us about the *true* world'" and do not get us to what is *really* out there (*TI,* "Philosophy" 167 §1). Therefore, Nietzsche views philosophers as proposing to "'above all, get rid of the *body*, this miserable *idée fixe* of the senses! full of all the errors of logic'" (*TI,* "Philosophy" 167 §1). In this way, Nietzsche accuses philosophers of promoting a hatred of the body because they believe it prevents us from reaching a more truthful existence.

In addition to the animosity for the body, Nietzsche also understands Christianity and the history of philosophy as a demeaning of the world. In particular, he explains that Christianity posits a perfect heaven realm beyond this wretched earthly world. Christianity claims that the *real* life occurs when you are with God in heaven, so you should not overly concern yourself with the pains of temporary human existence. In the history of philosophy, a rejection of our experiential existence is exemplified by Plato's idealism or Kant's idea of the noumenon, which postulate a realm beyond the one we naturally experience. Similar to Christianity, philosophers have claimed the world in which we actually live is not the True Reality. Nietzsche asserts, "the concept of the 'beyond', the 'true world', [was] invented to devalue the *only* world there is" (*EH,* "Destiny" 150 §8). Both Christianity and the history of philosophy involve contempt for this world in their advocacy to transcend what they view as an imperfect, untrue realm.

Nietzsche understands Christianity and the history of philosophy as prime examples of what he titles "decadent morality." One aspect of decadent morality is defined by Nietzsche as the depreciation and rejection of this imperfect, incorrect, or sinful realm of sensations and bodily perceptions. Another aspect of decadent morality is the preaching of the existence of a higher, virtuous, painless form of existence in the perfect realm of God, universal ideals, or truth beyond. Decadent morality attempts to 'cure' all sickness and pain through a postulation that the body and the world that involve pain are "bad." Thus, individuals who ascribe to decadent morality in order to try to remove pain become morally obligated to reject their visceral bodies and their experiential world.

As a result of this rejection of our bodies and the world, Nietzsche argues that decadent morality is fundamentally against life. In particular, Nietzsche sees Christianity as

"*hostility to life,* a furious, vengeful enmity towards life itself" (*B,* "Attempt" 9 §5). Similarly he asserts, "The concept 'God' [was] invented as a counter concept to life" (*EH*, "Destiny" 150 §8). Nietzsche also claims "The history of philosophy is a secret raging against the preconditions of life" (*WP* 253 §461). Although Nietzsche does not claim that religious or philosophical beliefs are unreal, he *is* concerned with what this morality implies about the life we are actually living right now, within our bodies, within this world. Therefore, while decadent morality claims to be helping people to live better or truer lives, Nietzsche conceives that in its violent aggression towards this body and this world, and thus its attack on this life, decadent morality is a life-threatening illness.

In that it is an opposition to life, Nietzsche understands decadent morality as preaching what was previously explained as slow suicide. Because it promotes escaping from the body and the world, Nietzsche understands decadent morality as viewing death as a welcome experience. He states, "Hatred of 'the world,' a curse on the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a Beyond, [was] invented in order better to defame the Here-and-Now, [and is] fundamentally a desire for nothingness, for the end" (*B,* "Attempt" 9 §5). Remember, as previously explained, the prime examples of slow suicide Nietzsche described were Christianity and Socrates, whom he saw as a key influence on the history of philosophy. Nietzsche views Christianity as promoting death because it encourages one to transcend this sickly life to join in an absolute euphoric, blissful, ecstasy with God. The history of philosophy promotes death in its belief that if we could just remove or get rid of our 'erroneous' body, then we could uncover truth. In attempt to escape the sickness and suffering inherent to existence, decadent morality leads people to hate what is conceptualized as a miserable world and an erroneous body. Therefore, decadent morality

is an "instinct for annihilation" in that it promotes the slow killing of oneself through an aggressive assault on life (*B,* "Attempt" 9 §5).

Nietzsche illustrates decadent morality's assault on life and slow suicide as similar to an addiction. Nietzsche explains that Christianity tried to provide "a shorter way to perfection: just as some philosophers thought they could […provide] a 'royal road to truth'" (*D* 36 §59). These 'cures' posed themselves as quick fixes for dealing with suffering, but turned into a detrimental addiction that covers over the pain instead of proactively dealing with it. Nietzsche states,

> The means which worked immediately, anaesthetizing and intoxicating, the so-called consolation, were ignorantly supposed to be actual cures; the fact was not even noticed, indeed, that these instantaneous alleviations often had to be paid for with a general profound worsening of the complaint, *that the invalid had to suffer from the after-effect of intoxication.* [italics added] (*D* 33 §52)

Just as a drug is often taken to immediately relieve some sort of issue, so too do these 'cures' seductively promise to provide a quick means of dealing with one's sufferings. Both a drug and decadent morality attempt to 'cure' by removing pain through 'transcending' the everyday world of suffering to an "intoxicating" euphoric bliss. However, this ecstasy is just a temporary episode, and the superficial healing powers quickly wear off. With both a drug and decadent morality a person is eventually faced again with the actual suffering of life and not knowing how to actively deal with everyday pains. The person's instincts become disoriented, and they begin to lose sense of what decisions are beneficial to their lives. This person may think they need another quick 'fix' that makes them forget their bodies and their world, but in this forgetting they lose sight of how to engage in and control

life at all. The addict spends their days obsessing about reducing and opposing the ever-increasing pains they feel, which means they stop any sort of active and affirmative living. These addicts devalue their bodies and their experiences in order to remove pain. The degradation of their bodies is apparent through their decaying physiology and psychology. The depreciation of their worlds manifests in the deterioration of their jobs, families, and homes. The 'cure' of Christianity and philosophy, like a drug, are *decadent* in that they involve harm from an excess of pleasure and degeneration from a lack of pain. Just like a drug addiction, the temporary 'cure' of decadent morality has become a life-threatening disease.

Another way that decadent morality is similar to an addiction is that the illness does not just affect the addict, but casts a shadow of suffering onto everyone around him or her. Nietzsche explains that because of decadent moralists, whom he calls "the drunkards […] the invalids […] the sickly and depressed," "the whole air is continually whizzing with the arrow of their malice, so that the sun and the sky of life are darkened by them- not only their sky but ours too" (*D* 160 §323). Here Nietzsche is explaining that even if a person does not partake in decadent morality, their life will still be affected by the sickness of modern society. Nietzsche views each of us as constantly affected by and in danger of falling ill to the disease of decadent morality. It is important to remember that Nietzsche is not talking about a physical illness in the sense of a flu or a cold, so much as he is describing a psychological, philosophical, and metaphorical sickness in which contemporary culture, and subsequently ourselves, are immersed.

D. Promotion of Sickness

This life-threatening decadent morality, in either the form of religion or philosophy, is "the only morality that has been taught so far" to modern society (*EH,* "Destiny" 149 §7). In other words, the only way in which contemporary society currently approaches sickness, or dealing with our mortal fallibility, is through the decadent hatred of life, which Nietzsche has shown to be a detrimental illness itself. Nietzsche's project is thus a positing of a new form of cure, a healthy alternative to decadent morality. Nietzsche claims that "if I became the master of anything" it was to "be able to look out from the optic of sickness towards *healthier* concepts and values" (*EH,* "Wise" 76 §1). Even though Nietzsche himself is immersed in the sickness of decadent morality, he understands his philosophical project as recognizing this sickness of our culture and attempting to emerge from out of it. In this way, Nietzsche's philosophy is different than traditional philosophy, which tends to steer away from taking care of bodily and mental health, and typically does not use physician or psychological terms such as "health" and "sickness." Thus it becomes clear why Nietzsche understands himself as a doctor or psychotherapist battling contemporary society's disease of decadent morality in the form of Christianity and the history of philosophy.

Nietzsche's medicine for the illness of decadent morality is an embracing of sickness and an affirmation of the whole of life. Nietzsche enthusiastically advocates an unconditional acceptance and celebration of all experiences. By embracing the negative aspects of life, Nietzsche is not just promoting an inversion of decadent morality. That is, Nietzsche does not propose a supreme valuation of pain in his opposition to decadent morality's promotion of absolute happiness. Rather, he asserts that "Nothing in existence should be excluded, nothing is dispensable" (*EH*, "Birth" 109 §2). Embracing the whole of life involves an acceptance of *all* types of experiences.

Nietzsche understands that we must come to embrace both 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of existence because they are necessarily linked. Nietzsche argues that pleasures and pains cannot be separated from one another; positivity requires negativity to exist; there is no good without the bad; happiness is not completely separate from distress; and health cannot emerge without sickness. Embracing the whole of life involves accepting both of these 'opposites.' Because they are connected, if a person tries to throw out their suffering, they also end up tossing out all the joys of life. Therefore, Nietzsche proposes an embracing of sickness, distress, and suffering, as necessary experiences in order to have health, happiness, and joy. Nietzsche contemplates, "what if pleasure and displeasure were so tied together that whoever *wanted* to have as much as possible of one *must* also have as much as possible of the other" (*GS* 85 §12). In addition to the fact they are not oppositional, these 'opposites' actually need one another in order to manifest. Nietzsche describes that "profound joy [is] where the bleakest and most painful things do not have the character of opposites, but instead act as its conditions, as welcome components" (*EH*, "Zarathustra" 127 §3). It is only through negative experiences that one can reach a higher state of positivity. Nietzsche similarly describes that, "It is precisely at [an] injured and weakened spot that the whole body is as it were *inoculated* with something new; […] Every progress of the whole has to be preceded by a partial weakening" (*HH,* "Tokens" 107 §224). Here Nietzsche takes the platitude 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger' and raises it up to a philosophically true statement. He asserts that we need the destabilizing, paralyzing effects of a sickness in order to emerge out of the sickness with a strengthened immune system and a refreshed perspective and excitement about living life. We become healthy not in spite of sickness, but precisely *because* of sickness.

If sickness is rejected, just as in decadent morality, a person will never be able to evolve into a greater health. They will be stuck in a mediocre state of stagnation or what Nietzsche calls the "religion of comfortableness." He says, "happiness and unhappiness are sisters and even twins that either grow up together or […] *remain small* together" (*GS* 270 §338). In this way, decadent morality is an attempt to tranquilize life. Because decadent morality attempts to flee from pain, and pain is precisely what enables the possibility of a healthy, strong, exuberant life, decadent morality immobilizes, paralyzes, and nullifies everyone that ascribes to a decadent moral system. Nietzsche ponders if we "require the sick soul as much as the healthy, and whether, in brief, the will to health alone, is not a prejudice, cowardice, and perhaps a bit of very subtle barbarism and backwardness" (*GS* 177 §120). Because the positive and negative are essentially connected, decadent morality, in its rejection of sickness and pain, loses out on experiencing health and joy and aims for a sedated, weak, wasted existence.

Nietzsche in his affirmation of all aspects of existence opposes decadent morality's rejection of the 'negative' aspects of existence. That is, Nietzsche promotes an embracing of the body and the world that sometimes involves pain, suffering, and sickness. He argues that these experiences need not be considered inadequacies of life, but as having the possibility to be fundamentally life nourishing. This support for the body and the world can be seen, for example, in the way in which Nietzsche presents his argument. Nietzsche uses words such as 'sickness,' 'disease,' 'cure,' 'pleasure,' and 'health,' which are all bodily terms. In addition, his illustrations oftentimes involve bodily or sensual metaphors, making valid the way in which we experience our body and our world. In total, Nietzsche advocates a gratitude for and affirmation of the whole of life, including the body and the world that

provide us with the necessary sicknesses, pains, and sufferings to become stronger, healthier, fuller.[21]

Armed with an understanding that Nietzsche advocates affirming the whole of life, we can now postulate that perhaps Nietzsche understands death as a necessary aspect of existence. Nietzsche highly values sickness and suffering, the greatest experiential examples of human fallibility, as the only ways in which we are able to emerge into an ever-greater health. Therefore, it seems likely that Nietzsche also values mortality, the supreme example of human fallibility, as an enhancement of life. Dastur believes that Nietzsche, as well as Heidegger, did indeed ascribe to this perspective. In particular, Dastur explains that both Nietzsche and Heidegger promote becoming a mortal, which "would require that we stop giving in to the illusions of immortality and become capable of truly living on the earth and dwelling in a body" (47). In other words, instead of considering the impermanence of our body and our world as a problem that needs to be overcome, Nietzsche and Heidegger argue that we need to fully become the mortal, bodily creatures that we are within this transitory world. Our human impermanence creates strength, power, health, and life. Dastur herself similarly understands that accepting death consists of "seeing in death the very condition of life and in considering mortality less as a limit than as the secret resource nourishing existence" (3). As a result, even though Nietzsche does not directly link sickness with death, through his elucidation of his central concept of sickness, we can indirectly see how he likely also views death as essential to truly living.

E. The Process of Convalescence

In order to better unpack Nietzsche's stance on death in life and death's role as essential to truly living, let us continue to examine Nietzsche's concept of sickness. Given that he views sickness as inexorably linked with health, Nietzsche's concept of health should be understood as convalescence. For Nietzsche, an individual has the possibility to emerge out of sickness into health with a reinvigorated vitality and exuberance. When an individual experiences physical convalescence, they feel joyful, powerful, and renewed. To a convalescent, everyday life seems to be more beautiful and meaningful than they had previously realized. When they are finally able to emerge from their bed, the convalescent experiences thankfulness for even the 'negative' aspects of their day. Being stuck in traffic or stubbing one's toe do not seem like a problem, but incredible events. Nietzsche's idea of health as convalescence involves this gratefulness for the whole of life, and an acknowledgement of the miraculous-ness and wonderfulness of all the moments of living.

In addition to understanding Nietzsche's conception of convalescing through what he directly writes, Nietzsche's readers are also exposed to his promotion of convalescence through many of his symbolic images. For example, within the preface of the *Gay Science* Nietzsche talks directly about his gratitude of convalescence as the attitude for the entire book (*GS* 32). He describes convalescence as an emergence from out of the cold, paralyzing, painful winter into a warmed, light-filled, renewed hope, and excitement about future adventures and goals. *Daybreak*, as the book title states, similarly alludes to this moment of emerging from out of cold, dark disorientation into powerful, excessive light, reawakened vigor for living, and embracing the possibilities of the day. As exemplified in the imagery from these book titles and prefaces, throughout his works, Nietzsche establishes an

underlying flavor of convalescence as the importance of utilizing sickness to become even healthier.

Nietzsche's promotion of convalescence can also be experienced through his writing style. Allison describes that after one reads Nietzsche, a person feels as if they are convalescing in that "things take on a richer patina in turn, a sensuous immediacy, *the way one feels after a long illness* [italics added]" (vii). Nietzsche writes in an empowering, invigorating, exciting way that leaves readers feeling electrified and ready to take on the world. As seen in the content of his text, his poetic imagery, and his stimulating writing style, central to Nietzsche's philosophical project is promoting sickness as a part of health in convalescence.

Another aspect of Nietzsche's understanding of convalescence is that this transitioning from sickness into health can never be completed. As such, health as convalescence is like a cyclical oscillation that never finishes. One "does not merely have [health] but also acquires [it] continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up" (*GS* 346 §382). A "great health" is a constant movement from sickness to healthier, and from sickness to healthier, *ad infinitum*. Health is a continuous dynamic re-emergence into a strengthened, ever anew, greater health. Therefore, Nietzsche's conception of health is a continuous convalesc*ing*.

In addition, because convalescence is a continuous process, it is slow and ongoing. This patient growing into health is in contrast to the quick fix that decadent morality promotes. Convalescing is a dwelling in recuperation in order to deeply experience the transition into health, again and again.

Furthermore, Nietzsche asserts that there is no such thing as an absolute, universal, "normal" health. He explains,

> [There] is no health as such, and all attempts to define a thing that way have been wretched failures. Even the determination of what is healthy for your *body* depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors, and above all the ideals and phantasms of your soul. Thus there are innumerable healths of the body […] In one person, of course, this health could look like its opposite in another person. (*GS* 177 §120)

Not only does Nietzsche think that health is different between people, he also explains health transforms over time within each individual. Therefore, Nietzsche understands health to be completely fluid and dependent entirely on each specific person at that particular moment in their lives.

Because health is specific to each individual, everyone who becomes healthy becomes a different kind of healthy. Moreover, Nietzsche seems to argue that not everyone can achieve health, at least in the sense of continuously convalescing into affirmative living. Nietzsche suggests, "*If possible live without a physician"* and be your own doctor (*D* 159 §322). Because this phrase implies that some people are not strong enough to be their own doctor, it seems that Nietzsche believes that some people cannot embrace their own unique version of health. As a result, Nietzsche seems to understand that some people may need to cling onto current moral systems, perhaps even onto decadent morality. Furthermore, Nietzsche explains that a person can be his or her own doctor only "*as long as [they] are basically healthy"* (*EH,* "Wise" 76 §2). This idea of basic health might seem to conflict with Nietzsche's previously explained assertion that there is no absolute health. However, while

Nietzsche does not want to define the content of each individual's health, he does argue that basic health involves the ability to transform one's being. It seems that Nietzsche asserts that being basically healthy does not necessarily mean a person must self-overcome, but that they *can* become healthier if they determine to do so. Therefore, Nietzsche recommends becoming one's own doctor only for people who are basically healthy. Nietzsche states, "for something that is typically healthy, sickness can actually be an energetic *stimulus* to life, to being more alive" (*EH*, "Wise" 76 §2). Only if you are already essentially healthy can you utilize your sickness to convalesce into an even healthier state.

Correspondingly, Nietzsche explains that if a person is basically weak then sickness will likely make them even sicker than they already are. He says, "Something with a typically morbid nature cannot become healthy, much less make itself healthy" (*EH,* "Wise" 76 §2). In this way, it seems that Nietzsche does not reproach people who are not convalescing because maybe they are not healthy enough to do so. If certain people who adopt decadent morality are essentially sick, then it seems that Nietzsche does not view their lack of health as a fault, but as an inability. In other words, even though Nietzsche opposes decadent morality, it is possible that he does not blame fundamentally weak people who ascribe to decadent morality.

In this way, Nietzsche seems to aim his philosophizing towards those who are already basically healthy. Therefore, if a person who is basically healthy falls ill, Nietzsche's philosophy is meant to encourage them to not adopt decadent morality and to instead utilize their sickness to become truly healthy. If this basically healthy person does adopt decadent morality, then Nietzsche's philosophy is meant to awaken them to the fact that ascribing to decadent morality restricts them from becoming healthier. Because Nietzsche

views decadent morality as an illness, Nietzsche tries to show this basically healthy person that they can convalesce from out of the disease of their decadent morality. In other words, Nietzsche tries to reveal to basically healthy people that they are able to utilize and emerge from the cultural sickness of decadent morality in order to grow into stronger health that they determine on their own.

Furthermore, because health transforms over time within each individual, Nietzsche encourages everyone to question their health repeatedly throughout their lives. Consequently, even if a person is too weak to overcome decadent morality, they should continue to reevaluate their ability and keep considering if they should become healthier. Said differently, Nietzsche wants everyone, including people who are so sick that they initially adopt decadent morality, to continue to re-ask and deeply question the health they are capable of at each moment.

Given that Nietzsche argues that health is temporary and particular to each individual, Nietzsche does not prescribe a set form of health. For example, Nietzsche's Zarathustra states, "'This – is now *my* way: where is yours?' Thus I answered those who asked me 'the way'. For *the* way – does not exist!" (*Z,* "Gravity" 213 §2). As a result, we need to understand Nietzsche's philosophy not as providing a prescription for everyone like a moralist who tells people to follow specific rules, but as an encouragement and pushing of those who are capable to convalesce into ever-healthier life. Even using the word 'health' instead of 'good' or 'improvement' shows that Nietzsche is not just providing another moral system like the decadent morality that he so adamantly opposes. Unlike the concepts of 'good' and 'improvement,' a person's health is not necessary for the betterment of society. Health is more personal in that it affects the very root of every individual's life, and it must

be specifically evaluated within each individual. Like a friend, Nietzsche is less worried about you fulfilling moral obligations to others, and he is most concerned about and wants you to pay attention to your own health.

Also like a friend or a therapist, Nietzsche supports you in your own path to health and tries to guide you to guide yourself. Allison says, "Like a true friend, he rarely tells you what you ought to do" and only gives suggestions for considerations in making your own choices (vii). Despite the hazard of harmful misinterpretations, Nietzsche ultimately has a faith in his readers' abilities to best know what their own health consists of. In this way, Nietzsche's antidote to the pervasive addiction of decadent morality is not a prescription. Rather, Nietzsche equips us with a process in which we can question the status of our health, consider what is most life affirming, and, if necessary, uproot ourselves and emerge into greater health through a utilization of our sickness.

F. Nietzsche's Philosophical Therapy

In summary, this chapter has shown that Nietzsche's personal philosophical therapy opposes the set instruction of decadent morality. Nietzsche holds issue with decadent morality, which, in essence, is contemporary society's rejection of 'negative' experiences. Nietzsche illustrates Christianity and the history of philosophy as prime examples of decadent morality in that they reject 'negative' experiences, specifically through a devaluation of our fallible bodies and impermanent world. Decadent morality prescribes that people reject and hate their pain, sickness, and suffering, so that they may reach an absolute ideal beyond state void of these 'negative' experiences. Nietzsche argues that in its

attempt to completely remove the pains of life, decadent morality is a violent opposition to and attack on life, and is thus a dangerous, life-threatening disease.

In contrast, Nietzsche recognizes the importance of 'negative' experiences in that they are the necessary preconditions of health, exuberance, strength, and truly living. Thus, Nietzsche promotes an embracing of the whole of life through a welcoming of and gratitude for sickness, suffering, and destruction. As such, Nietzsche re-conceptualizes sickness and health as fundamentally interconnected in a continuous convalescing, and re-convalescing. Nietzsche suggests that if we are capable, we should try to utilize our sufferings, including the decadent morality disease of contemporary society, in order to transform ourselves into ever-greater health.

Therefore, in opposition to the set prescription of decadent morality, Nietzsche therapeutically tries to enable and encourage you to personally decide when and how to utilize your 'negative' experiences in order to convalesce into a health of exuberantly affirming the whole of this life. Nietzsche asserts that convalescing will never be completed, will never be simple or easy, and we must tread the path on our own. While, for some people, this is terrifying in that it means there can be no prescription for an absolute health void of all pain as decadent morality claims, it also means that we have a constant potentiality to become healthier than our current state.

H. Promotion of Death in Life

Through both his promotion of affirmative suicide and his encouragement of a utilization of sickness to convalesce into health, Nietzsche indirectly exposes how he conceptualizes death in life. In particular, the continually made decision of if and when to

kill ourselves, either physically or metaphorically, is a striking manifestation of how we must confront death in our lives. In addition, our dealings with sicknesses, sufferings, and pains are also ways in which we have to face, through our bodily experiences, our mortality on a day-to-day basis. Nietzsche views the manner in which we relate to these manifestations of death in our everyday existence as of central importance, understanding both affirmative suicide and an acceptance of sickness as potentially in the service of life. Specifically, Nietzsche believes that given the right circumstances, neither killing oneself nor illness are an opposition or degradation of life, but, rather, are crucial, necessary, and enhancing aspects of our existence. As a result, it can be indirectly apprehended that Nietzsche more generally understands death as essential to life. In other words, Nietzsche likely also views death as a 'negative' aspect of existence, perhaps even the most fundamental, that needs to be embraced and celebrated in order to push ourselves into active affirmation. As such, Nietzsche strives to provide his readers with a renewed perspective of the potential benefits of even our darkest terrors, including our death, in order to help propel us forward into convalescing and truly living.

Like Ariès, Becker, TMT, and Heidegger, Nietzsche explains the central affect death has on our existence, as well as points out the detriment and dangers of the severe denial of death in our contemporary Western culture. Nietzsche also supplements Ariès, Becker, TMT, and Heidegger in providing a personal therapeutic methodology so that we may be able to approach our death differently, to see its essential and important connection to life, and to apprehend the potential benefits of death within our own lives.

Conclusion

The above chapters have presented a series of descriptions of five interdisciplinary perspectives on the problem of a pervasive concealment of death in the modern West. In particular this thesis examined the relevant works of historian Phillipe Ariès, theoretical anthropologist Ernest Becker, the experimental psychologists involved in Terror Management Theory, continental philosopher Martin Heidegger, and philosophical cultural therapist Friedrich Nietzsche.[22]

I. Ariès

The first chapter looked at the work of respected historian Phillipe Ariès who investigated the transformation of the concept of death in the Western world. Ariès looks back over a thousand years to show that our modern attitude is drastically different than the way death had been perceived in past historical epochs. In particular, he describes death in its contemporary Western guise as severely rejected, silenced, and covered over. Modern society has come to view death as wild and even unnatural, to the point that it can barely be acknowledged within life. While it may feel like our current perspective is instinctive and absolute, and all humans have always tried to avoid thinking about their ultimate demise, Ariès provides a detailed account of how this sense is erroneous. Furthermore, Ariès asserts our contemporary denial of death is psychologically detrimental. While he does not provide a thorough prescription, he lays out the facts about how our perspective upon death has not always been this way in order to open the idea that maybe our conception should not actually be this way. Using a historical level of investigation, Ariès begins the conversation about how death is not the moment of demise,

but a phenomenon that is constantly affecting us, and thus, that we need to question how we can and should confront our mortality.

II. Becker

The second chapter describes the work of Ernest Becker, a theoretical anthropologist and Pulitzer Prize winner who has been able to translate his ideas regarding the denial of death to a broader, non-academic audience. Becker postulates that the most fundamental human motivation is a denial of death, or that what we do, feel, and believe is a result of our desire to flee from the awareness of our ultimate perishing. Becker explains that the primary way in which we flee from our death is an adoption, protection, and bolstering of our culture. Specifically, Becker describes that our culture acts a system that reduces our overwhelming anxiety about death by providing us with a sense of distance from our mortal animality and by imbuing us with a feeling of symbolic immortality. Becker also argues that in order to maintain our illusion that we will not actually die, we must reject and oppose all cultural systems that threaten the validity of our cultural system. As a result, Becker proposes that oftentimes this preservation of our cultural identities results in the harming of others. Although he does not think this need to flee from our death can be eradicated from human being, Becker does think certain cultural systems are better than others. However, Becker is dangerously unclear in his explanation of the religious solution, what he proposes as the better system to embrace.

III. Terror Management Theory

Becker's discussion about the broad impact of death in our daily functioning has affected many academics in different fields. Of note is the formation of Terror Management Theory within experimental psychology. TMT researchers use the scientific method to demonstrate the widespread everyday effects of non-conscious death denial. After laying out the basics of Becker's theory, the third chapter of this thesis elucidates the typical process of a TMT experiment and describes a variety of the results gathered over the past few decades. It is shown that TMT as an experimental science is also pointing to the idea our conception of death plays a prevalent role in our lives. Moreover, TMT research is beginning to question the different and potential beneficial ways in which we can approach our mortality.

Although Becker and TMT researchers through their scientific analysis are able to report and postulate probable ways in which we confront our mortality, they are unable to clearly investigate how we can and should approach our death. Ariès too, as a historian, is restricted by his discipline in the depth of his questioning the health of our modern formulations and in proposing future conceptions. These social scientists are methodologically limited to describing what our conception of death has been and seems to be, and thus are incapable of proposing possibilities and asking the question of what our finitude means in our everyday existence. In order to more fully examine how death is in our everyday life, the second half of this thesis looks towards continental philosophy.

IV. Heidegger

More precisely, the fourth chapter describes the perspective of Martin Heidegger who uses rigorous ontological phenomenology to investigate death as a part of human

being. With his concept of being-towards-death, Heidegger goes beyond Ariès, Becker, and TMT in defining death as an aspect of our ontological constitution. While the social scientists explain how death significantly affects our thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs, Heidegger goes farther to describe that we *are* constantly toward our death— we are being-towards-death. It is because we die, Heidegger maintains, that we have the possibility to relate to our death in either an inauthentic or authentic manner. Heidegger is similar to Ariès, Becker, and TMT in his explanation that we have a tendency to inauthentically flee from our death. However, Heidegger also asserts that we have the possibility for authentic being-towards-death, which involves embracing how death affects our very being. Authentic being-towards-death is a taking hold of and owning ourselves as who we are, as beings of possibility because of our very finitude. Although his ideas are complicated and obscure, Heidegger illustrates that we can authentically be-towards-death through anxious resolute running ahead, which involves grasping and sustaining death as the possibility it is. While Heidegger does not concretely demonstrate how one can accomplish authentic being-towards-death, nor is he recommending it as a "solution," he, unlike Ariès, Becker, and TMT researchers, is able to show us a possible way besides denial in which we can approach our death. Heidegger ontologically describes the possibilities of confronting and assuming our mortality in an affirmative manner, which have real implications in our lives.

V. Nietzsche

This thesis finishes by examining Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosophical therapist of culture who indirectly focuses on the ways in which we relate to death within our lives.

Specifically, Nietzsche examines our current evaluation of suicide and sickness. Nietzsche describes that in our contemporary society we consider all 'negative' experiences, including suicide and sickness, as problems that need to be eradicated. However, Nietzsche argues that this current negative evaluation of our human fallibility and impermanence is a dangerous life-threatening disease. Instead, Nietzsche promotes suicide when it affirms life and praises sickness when it enhances our existence. In this way, it can be seen that Nietzsche views not truly living, instead of death, as the opposite of life. As a result, Nietzsche opposes what he calls slow suicide and decadent morality, which involve a decaying, wasteful, hatred of life. Nietzsche proposes that instead of fleeing from our fallible bodies and impermanent worlds, we need to fully become the mortal creatures that we are within this transitory world, and this creates real strength, power, health, and life. In other words, he argues that we can utilize our 'negative' experiences, including death, in order to convalesce into a healthier existence. While Nietzsche does not tend to comment directly on a general conception of death, through his promotion of affirmative suicide and the life-enhancement of 'negative' aspects of human existence, it seems that Nietzsche understands a celebration of and gratitude for death as being of central importance to truly living.

VI. Nietzsche's Supplement to Ariès, Becker, TMT, and Heidegger

If we understand Nietzsche's conception of affirmative suicide and convalescing as representative of his understanding of death, it becomes clear how his philosophy relates to and goes beyond the other thinkers discussed within this thesis. In particular, Nietzsche echoes the ideas of Ariès and Becker in that he too sees this rejection of our death as

especially extreme in our modern world. Moreover, like Heidegger, Ariès, and Becker, Nietzsche shows that our denial of death is detrimental to our lives.

In addition, Nietzsche's philosophy can be specifically contrasted with Becker's theorizing. Nietzsche is similar to Becker in that he too views moral systems as constructed through the ways we reject our death. Becker explains that moral systems, what he calls cultural heroic systems, are different forms of death denial. Comparatively, Nietzsche describes that decadent morality, the only morality that has been taught thus far to society, is a rejection of our mortality. However, Nietzsche, unlike Becker, argues that it is possible there could be a 'moral' system that does not deny death. Because Becker does not view this as a possibility, Becker promotes the religious solution as the best way to deny death. Nietzsche would likely hold issue with Becker's promotion of the religious solution in that it is very similar to the decadent morality that Nietzsche adamantly opposes. Specifically, Becker's religious solution involves transcending this body and this world into a realm with God, thus devaluing our existence and fundamentally opposing life. While Nietzsche is not against religion, he is against the hatred of life of religions like the one Becker promotes.

In contrast to Becker's promotion of the religious solution, Nietzsche seems to promote a system more like that of Becker's creative solution. In his striving to equip his readers with a way in which they themselves can construct their own system of health, Nietzsche promotes a process of creation. While Becker's creative solution involves constructing one's own system to deny death, Nietzsche instead promotes the construction of one's own creative way to affirm, approach, and utilize death. Nietzsche understands creation as a 'solution' to our fallible, painful existence in that it helps us to transform these 'negative' experiences into greater, stronger life. Nietzsche states, "Creation – that is the

great redemption from suffering, and life's easement. But that the creator may exist, that itself requires suffering and much transformation. Yes, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators! Thus you are advocates and justifiers of all transitoriness" (*Z,* "Islands" 111). Similarly, Nietzsche celebrates the people whom he calls free spirits. Free spirits, according to Nietzsche, are people who do not have faith or desire certainty, and who thus break away from tradition, habituation, and their surroundings in order to think differently (*HH*, "Tokens" 108 §225; *GS* 291 §347). Free spirits live dangerously, experiment with themselves, and dance near abysses. In this way, Nietzsche's free spirits seem as if they adopt Becker's creative solution in that they reject the traditional forms of approaching death, and as a result put themselves in risk of instability. While Becker would likely view these free spirits as problematically ungrounded, which is why it seems he promotes the religious solution over the creative solution, Nietzsche understands these free spirits as those who are capable of utilizing their human mortality into order to convalesce into truly great and healthy lives. As a result, Nietzsche is fundamentally different from Becker in that Nietzsche views our death as potentially of benefit to life, whereas Becker views our death as problematic and requiring a "solution" for us to deny it. Furthermore, Nietzsche contrasts free spirits with fettered spirits, people whom he describes as being habituated to the point of having "faith." Given that Becker's promotion of the religious solution involves a "leap of faith," Nietzsche's opposition to "faith" further exposes that he would likely have severe distain for Becker's religious solution. As a result, it is clear that Nietzsche's promotion of a creative approach, utilization, and valuation of death is in complete opposition with Becker's religious rejection of our mortal existence.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Nietzsche does not promote any form of health, including a creative convalescing, as an absolute choice for everyone and at all times.

Therefore, Nietzsche's project can be understood as fundamentally different from that of Becker's. Becker asks the questions of how we deny our death and what is the best way to do so. However, Nietzsche asks what it means to me and how does it affect my life given that I will die and that I have a tendency to deny this fact. In this way, instead of trying to investigate what is the least harmful general way to deny our death, Nietzsche gets us to question for ourselves how we can relate to our death in a way to affirm our lives. Becker prescribes a universal ideal of transcendent religion, and Nietzsche equips us with a process to prescribe ourselves an antidote for this decadent morality Becker promotes.

Another way in which to understand Nietzsche's perspective of death is by recognizing the similarity with Heidegger's conception of being-towards-death. Specifically, like Heidegger's concentration on how we are *toward* our death, Nietzsche makes clear the importance of how a person relates to their finitude within their existence, such as in the question of suicide and our viewpoint of sickness. As a result, both Nietzsche and Heidegger declare that it is not the moment of demise that is significant, but how I relate to my death in life. In this way, Nietzsche and Heidegger understand our relation towards death as a fundamental part of human existence, which can be contrasted with the social scientists who seem to assume death is dying or the end moment of perishing. Furthermore, Nietzsche and Heidegger both view that our possibilities of life open through our finitude. In other words, Nietzsche and Heidegger understand that if we relate to our mortality with an authentic embracing and owning of our death, then we can take hold of and determine the possibilities in our life. In addition, Nietzsche is similar to Heidegger in

that he does not provide a straightforward, explicit description of what this authentic relation entails. While Heidegger explains this authentic relation with his, perhaps purposefully obscured, terms of an anxious running ahead resolute choice, Nietzsche asserts that this authentic relation is a particular life-affirming convalescing that he cannot provide for you but that you must decide for yourself. In short, Nietzsche and Heidegger both seem to understand that you must self-determine your authentic relation to death.

However, while Heidegger does not promote an authentic relation to death as superior to other modes of relating to death, Nietzsche does champion this understanding of death as especially healthy and life affirming. Furthermore, Nietzsche is also different than Heidegger in his ability to bring this discussion of the different ways to relate to our death onto a more personal level. Nietzsche uses his methodology to try to get his readers to embody his ideas and actually begin to experience, confront, and sometimes even embrace impermanence. In this way, it might even be thought that Nietzsche assists his readers in embodying the anxious running ahead resoluteness of Heidegger's authentic being-towards-death. Regardless, Nietzsche surpasses the complex ontological explanations of Heidegger in that Nietzsche's experiential methodology enables me to begin to grapple with what my death means to my everyday life. Therefore, in total, through his promotion of affirmative suicide and life-enhancing sickness, Nietzsche goes beyond Ariès, Becker, and TMT in that he proposes potential other ways besides denial in which to confront our morality, and he also goes beyond Heidegger in that his explanation can be understood within my personal, everyday life.

VII. Death in Life through Theoretical & Experimental Psychology and Continental Philosophy

While this thesis is not meant to give a full description of all conceptions of death, it is the hope that utilizing an interdisciplinary approach within this thesis enables a more comprehensive conversation about how our mortality is not just the moment of our demise but is a fundamental aspect of our entire existence. Where one methodology excels at describing the evolution of the concept of death over time, another is better at describing how death is a distinct part of our unique being. Where one methodology is especially comprehensive at postulating how death affects our beliefs, behaviors, and emotions in our everyday lives, another is better at getting us to emotionally embody what this means and what we could do about it.

All of the thinkers discussed in this thesis describe the dangers involved in our severe contemporary rejection of death. Ariès argues that the contemporary denial of our mortality detrimentally affects how we conceptualize our existence. Becker and TMT show that our fleeing from death results in the harming of others who are different from us. Heidegger ontologically describes that our denial prevents us from owning ourselves, from taking hold of our possibilities. Nietzsche explains that our rejection of these crucial, impermanent aspects of our being are a life-threatening illness that keep us from emerging and re-emerging into ever-healthier, joyful life. While Becker and TMT seem to hold steadfast onto a belief in a universal human nature of death denial, Ariès, Nietzsche, and Heidegger assert that we have the possibility to not flee from our death. Ariès exposes that we have not always so adamantly rejected our death as we do in our modern era, and he explains that not so many hundreds of years ago we understood that death was a fundamental part of life. Nietzsche and Heidegger describe that we do not have to completely reject our death, and that we can understand death as what enables us to be

extraordinarily human. By tapping into these impermanent aspects of who we are and facing our death authentically, our possibilities open and we can become healthier, stronger, and exuberant. Through unfolding the interdisciplinary work of Ariès, Becker, TMT researchers, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, it is the goal of this thesis to show humans, in our contemporary Western era, tend to deny their death, to argue that this greatly affects our lives in a way that is detrimental and dangerous, and suggest there could be other, healthier ways in which we can approach our impermanence.

Notes

[1] Ariès point is also made by Heidegger, which will be described in more detail in Chapter Four. Just as Ariès explains that in current times people tell the dying they are not actually dying, Heidegger similarly describes that we use specific language to talk to the dying in order to remove death's character of possibility.

[2] Going further than Becker, Nietzsche argues that our denial of death is not the only necessary fiction. Nietzsche asserts that all of our conceptions, and thus 'truth' in general, is a vital lie. However, in a way, Becker too sees every moment of our lives permeated by necessary illusion because he views our denial of death effecting our everyday thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs. Nietzsche's perspective will be discussed furhter in Chapter Five.

[3] Remember that Ariès too saw the modern denial of death linked with a denial of life. Coinciding with Becker's description of the depressed automatic cultural man, Ariès suggests that contemporary Western people recoil from living in attempt to deny their death.

[4] It is important to note that Becker's perspective of mental illness is only for modern day Westerners. Becker believes those who modern day Westerners would consider mentally ill would be thought of as heroes in other cultures (BDM 131).

[5] By using the term 'evil,' Becker dangerously places himself in an ethical debate. He seems to momentarily forget that using the word 'evil' exposes his own cultural heroic system. If we listen to his theory, Becker himself appears to be battling against the 'evil' protection of cultural systems, so that he himself may play the role of the hero in order to flee from his own personal terror of mortality. However, it is possible Becker uses this weighty word in attempt to ruffle his thinkers into more deeply questioning the value of

uncritically supporting one's cultural system. Nevertheless, using the term "evil" inadvertently seems to be guiding his readers towards one particular cultural system, which may not be the best way to get them to critically think about the consequences of their own cultural system. If we substitute Becker's misleading term "evil" for "harming others" which is what he seems to actually be implying, then we can continue to seriously consider the general ideas Becker proposes. While there are problems with Becker's argument, it is important to keep in mind that Becker was treading into fairly uncharted territory in his attempt to scientifically speak about existential truths.

[6] The term "fundamental attribution error" was first proposed in E.E. Jones and V.A Harris' "The Attribution of Attitudes" in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (3.1) published in 1967.

[7] For more information on cognitive dissonance see Leon Festinger's *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* published by Stanford University Press in 1957.

[8] Heidegger, like Becker, also points to ways in which distraction assists in the denial of our death. Specifically, Heidegger illustrates that we preoccupy ourselves with things within the world and become absorbed into an anonymous public, which lead us to an inauthentic relation to our death. This idea will be explained more precisely in Chapter Four.

[9] For an interesting take on the creative solution as the foundation of the religious solution see Fred C. Alford's "Inflicting Evil as an Alternative to the Dread of Dying: An Independent Test of Generative Death Anxiety" in *Death and Denial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Legacy of Ernest Becker* edited by Daniel Liechty and published in 2002. Alford suggests that Becker's lack of clarity regarding creativity is the fundamental

weakness in Becker's theory. Alford believes that instead of directly promoting religion, Becker should have instead championed creativity, both in the arts and in religion (27). In particular, Alford argues creativity leads to the least harming of others in that it provides an alternative, non-living entity that a person can oppose in order to necessarily feel they are protecting their denial of death. Alford states, "Instead of expressing our doom, our dread in the face of our own vulnerability and mortality, in and through the bodies and minds of others, we express it in abstract form, in words rather than deeds, in images rather than actions on the bodies of others" (22). More specifically, Alford illustrates "In creative work, the body is projected into an artifact, where it can be transformed, enhanced, played with, even used ruthlessly because it is not really the human body but a body of work" (22). Through creativity, Alford believes we can transfer our mortality onto the work, and come to face, understand, and deal with our finitude through our creation instead of another person. In this way, Alford is able to elucidate creativity as less harmful than other forms of death denial as well as describe the relation between creativity and religion in a manner that Becker was unable to do.

[10] Even though Becker does not himself provide an adequate explanation of his religious solution in order to guide a person through the process of dealing with their existential tension, he criticizes psychotherapy for doing the same thing. Becker states, "All the [psychological] analysis in the world doesn't allow the person to find out *who he is* and why he is here on earth, why he has to die, and how he can make his life a triumph" (DD 193). Becker argues that even if therapy could successfully uncover existential aspects of our lives, and even though it sometimes provides moments of joy and growth, psychotherapy cannot give patients a sustained way to deal with the exposed problems

(DD 270). Therefore, Becker's promotion of religion can be criticized for the same thing he finds fault with in modern psychotherapy because he himself does not clearly describe how a person participates in the religious solution to best deny their death**.**

[11] *SZ* refers to the page numbers of *Sein und Zeit,* Heidegger's original German *Being and Time.*

[12] While authentic being-towards-death is described in more depth later in Chapter Four, in general, Heidegger explains that authentic being-towards-death involves understanding death as one's most own possibility, as owning one's death. These phrases resonate with "one's own death," which is the title Ariès gives for the second period of his history of the Western concept of death. Within this period of "one's own death," Ariès explains that death was accepted as a basic aspect of life much more than it is today. This historical description of "owning" one's "own" death as a part of life is strikingly similar to Heidegger's conception of owning one's death in authentic being-towards-death.

[13] This cycling back movement of running ahead in order to come back to oneself occurs throughout Heidegger's philosophy, especially in his discussion of Temporality in Part II of *Being and Time*. Specifically, Heidegger explains that Dasein is primarily futural, but in its being futural it is coming back to its having-been, which is what enables a making-present. In this way, Heidegger understands time as ekstatic Temporality in contrast to the traditional conception of time as a linear sequence of nows. Furthermore, Heidegger opens up Part II of *Being and Time* with his description of being-towards-death, as the introduction to his unfolding of ekstatic Temporality. We can see the connection between death and ekstatic Temporality when Heidegger states, "*Only an entity which, in its Being, is essentially* futural *so that it is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its*

factical 'there' by shattering itself against death- that is to say, only as an entity which, as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of having-been, *can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own thrownness and be* in the moment of vision *for 'its time."* (*BT* [MR] 437/*SZ* 385). This quote begins to show the complicated centrality of being-towards-death in Heidegger's understanding of Dasein, Being, and Temporality.

[14] It is important to note that Heidegger does not again mention conscience after his description in *Being and Time.* Heidegger's discussion of conscience is included in this thesis because within *Being and Time* conscience is deeply connected to the concept of authentic being-towards-death. However, given his lack of further formulation, it seems likely that Heidegger eventually saw some issue with the way he conceptualized being-towards-death as connected to conscience.

[15] Art may be one possible example of how Dasein can concretely authentically be-towards-death. In other words, art may be one way Dasein can experientially anxiously anticipate its being-towards-death and thus authentically set free itself as possibility. After writing *Being and Time*, at a point in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology,* Heidegger argues, "Poetry, creative literature, is nothing but the elementary emergence into words, the becoming-uncovered, of existence as being-in-the-world" (*BPP* 171). That is, Heidegger understands poetry as a way in which Dasein's being is disclosed to itself. Later in his career, Heidegger also wrote "Origin of the Work of Art" in which he explains the disclosure of Being happens in the work of art. Within this essay, he explains that a work of art, "opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* Trans. Hofstadter 38). In this way, Heidegger describes art and poetizing as concrete ways in which Dasein can uncover its being as a

being-in-the-world that is being-towards-death, and also possibly reveal Being more generally.

In addition, within "Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger speaks about the silence of poetry exposing the Being of beings. This description of art as a silent revealing of Being coincides greatly with the silent call of conscience that reveals to Dasein its being, described as the existentiell, ontic mechanism of authentic being-toward-death in *Being and Time.* This similarity of silence is yet another way in which it seems that Heidegger sees a connection between art and authentic being-towards-death, perhaps making art one way in which we can experientially anxiously run ahead resolutely into our death.

[16] While the phrase "appealing way to confront death" is awkward, it is necessary to use this description because Heidegger does not conceive of authenticity as better than inauthenticity. However, given his description of inauthentic being-towards-death as involving, for example, "falling" and being "pre-determined," it seems to the reader that authenticity, which involves "liberation" and "owning oneself," is a more appealing way to confront mortality.

[17] See *Nietzsche as Cultural Physician* by Daniel R. Ahern.

[18] Nietzsche's brief genealogical explanations of our current rejection of pain and suicide coincide with Ariès historical work illustrating our contemporary denial of death, including suicide, and everything related to death, including bodily pain.

[19] Ariès echoes Nietzsche's understanding of Christianity as an attempt to remove sickness, suffering, and pain from life. Ariès explains that it seems, "a vague but powerful belief in the continuity and goodness of nature has penetrated religious and moral practices in English-speaking countries and popularized the idea that suffering, poverty,

and death should and could be eliminated" (HOC 595). Ariès points out that death too is included in the religious list of rejected 'negative' experiences, something that Nietzsche does not directly say but also seems to believe.

[20] Dastur, like Ariès and Nietzsche, also understands religion as involving a belief that death is an imperfection. Dastur notes monotheistic religions who view God as infinite and perfect, come to understand the finite as imperfect (43). Furthermore, Dastur also believes that this view of an imperfect mortality is furthered throughout the history of philosophy, from Descartes to Kant. In this way, Dastur understands, like Nietzsche, both Christianity and the history of philosophy as a severe rejection of the impermanent 'negative' aspects of our humanity.

[21] Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to unpack Nietzsche's doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, it is important to note when discussing Nietzsche's concept of the affirmation of the whole of life. Nietzsche understands his doctrine of Eternal Recurrence as "the highest possible formula of affirmation" (*EH,* "Zarathustra" 123 §1). While there are many interpretations of Nietzsche's doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, one way in which to view the doctrine is as an experiential way in which we are tested to affirm the whole of life. For example, in his first declaration of the doctrine, Nietzsche asks the question what you would do if a demon proclaimed, "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more […Every] pain and every joy […] will return to you, all in the same succession and sequence" (*GS* 273 §341). In this way, at least in this specific declaration, it seems that Nietzsche proposes the world, everyone, and everything will recur in exactly the same details in exactly the same way over and over again for eternity. In addition, within this aphorism, Nietzsche wonders specifically

whether you would loathe and curse or praise and celebrate what the demon told you. As a result, what seems most important about Eternal Recurrence is the way in which one relates to what it proposes, the attitude one has regarding this possibility. A person can understand the eternal repetition of all events as imbuing life with meaninglessness and then that nothing matters, or meaningfulness and that everything matters (see Heidegger's *Nietzsche* "The Eternal Recurrence of the Same" §24). If a person is able to view the doctrine as proclaiming the latter, that every aspect of life has meaning, then they come to understand even the 'negative' aspects of life as essential. Moreover, affirming Eternal Recurrence does not simply involve a cognitive acceptance, but an exuberant love for the whole of existence, what Nietzsche calls *amor fati* (see *EH,* "Clever" 99 §10). Therefore, an affirmation of Eternal Recurrence involves an acceptance for and celebration of all the joy *and* the pain of life. Consequently, the affirmation of Eternal Recurrence is in opposition to decadent morality's devaluation and rejection of pain, suffering, sickness, and death. In this way, an affirmation of Eternal Recurrence can be seen as a medicine to convalesce from out of the life-threatening disease of decadent morality, to come embrace all the aspects of our lives, including our death.

[22] There is an interesting historical connection between many of the thinkers discussed within this thesis. Franz Brentano (1838-1917), considered both a psychologist and a philosopher, studied intentionality, that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. Sigmund Freud and Edmund Husserl were both students of Brentano.

Eventually, Freud moved his focus from consciousness to instead highlight the functions of the unconscious. Freud was also highly influenced by Nietzsche. Otto Rank was a thinker in the Freudian Circle, undoubtedly influenced by Freud, and subsequently

Brentano and Nietzsche. Otto Rank later became the primary influence on Ernest Becker. Becker, as previously explained, then became the central theorist of Terror Management Theory.

In addition, after Husserl studied with Brentano, he decided to more rigorously analyze consciousness, and thus developed phenomenology. Husserl was Heidegger's teacher, so he had a major influence on Heidegger's thinking. Furthermore, even though Heidegger does not acknowledge Nietzsche as a source of influence for *Being and Time,* there does seem to be an effect of Nietzsche on Heidegger's thinking, especially when taking into consideration Heidegger's *Nietzsche* lectures. Also, Carl Jung was another thinker in the Freudian Circle, who was thus also indirectly connected with Brentano. Carl Jung taught Merdard Boss, and Boss himself worked with Freud for a period of time. After befriending Heidegger, Boss developed Daseinanalysis, utilizing Heidegger's philosophy in psychotherapy.

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