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***On the Finitude of Life: Bernard Williams from a Kantian Standpoint*¹**

Beyond the existential connotation of questions about the meaning of life, its finiteness, and its transience, which have been addressed within Western philosophy since its origin (think of, just to mention a few examples, Plato's *Phaedo*, Epicurus's *Letter to Menoecus*, Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, or Seneca's *De Brevitate Vitae*),² the question of the meaningfulness of an infinite human life gains new philosophical attention due to the current scientific progress hastened by the developments and new frontiers of biotechnologies.³

In my analysis, I aim to shed light on some arguments in favour of the thesis that human life's finiteness is something desirable for human beings by supporting the thesis of the goodness of mortality in the contemporary debate on the so-called 'philosophy of death' through a recourse to Kant's philosophy. I offer a novel interpretation of Kant's ideas on the finitude of a human life starting from the perspective of the contemporary philosophy of death. I argue for interpreting Kant's account in light of this contemporary debates regarding the goodness of a finite human life.

I will concentrate on the way in which the definition of the concepts of human life and death relate to the meaningfulness of the finitude of a human life. In this way, the main question the following reflections are dedicated to is one concerning the meaningfulness of a supposed possible infinite human life.

I begin, in the first section, by addressing and giving the coordinates regarding this topic. In order to do so, I will introduce some of the most recent studies in the area of the philosophy of death.⁴ In particular, I will focus on the reflections by Bernard Williams and accompany this analysis with a survey of some further suggestions by Shelly Kagan, Martha Nussbaum, John M. Fischer, Connie Rosati, and Thomas Nagel. I argue that, based on Bernard Williams' reflections, we can hold that immortality is not desirable for humans, since human

¹ This paper is a significantly revised and extended version of a paper presented at the Humboldt-Kolleg *Probleme der Vernunft. Kant im Kontext* held at the University of Ferrara in May 2022 and at the Fachbereichskolloquium of the University of Konstanz in June 2022. I would like to thank the audiences at these two venues for their helpful comments, and in particular Bill Molyneux for his useful suggestions and linguistic revision of the text. The work for the present paper has been finalised thanks to funding by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Humboldt-Kolleg *Probleme der Vernunft. Kant im Kontext*, Ferrara, May 2022) and by the *European Union – Next Generation EU* (PRIN 2022, Code 2022MKPF9Y, Project: "The Paradigm Shift in the Modern Understanding of Freedom").

² For a first orientation on the topic of death in the Greek and Latin literature, see G. B. Matthews: "Death in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle". In: B. Bradley – F. Feldman – J. Johansson (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 186-199; Philipp Mitsis: "When Death Is There, We Are Not. Epicurus on Pleasure and Death". In: B. Bradley – F. Feldman – J. Johansson (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 200-217.

³ On this point, see, among others, M. Sandel: *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009; F. Fukuyama: *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2002; C. Overall: *Aging, Death, and Human Longevity: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2003; C. Overall: "From Here to Eternity: Is It Good to Live Forever?". In: D. Benatar (ed.): *Life, Death, and Meaning. Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions*. London: Rowman & Littlefield 2010, pp. 349-362; T. Ramge: *Wollt ihr ewig leben? Vom Fluch der Unsterblichkeit und Segen der Biotechnologie*. Stuttgart: Reclam 2023.

⁴ In his general introduction to the handbook on the *philosophy of death*, the editors define this discipline as 'intersubdisciplinary' – cf. B. Bradley – F. Feldman – J. Johansson (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, in particular pp. 1-4.

subjective experience is unthinkable except as finite human subjective experience within a finite human life. In other words, I will argue that human experience in life, i.e., a subjective, temporal, and finite experience, is the type of experience desirable for living humans, and it is in the interest of humans to preserve themselves as finite subjects of life experience.

In the second section, I will consider some arguments from modern philosophy on the topic of the meaninglessness of an infinite life for human beings, which are neglected in the contemporary debate. I argue that, going back to Kant, we find a further argumentative strategy in defence of the meaningfulness of the perishability of human life, as it is presented in the contemporary philosophy of death.

I argue that, rather than being unactual, Kant's claim that we 'live in two worlds' furnishes new arguments for the thesis of the meaningfulness of the finitude of human life. I claim that, according to Kant, the phenomenal world becomes interesting for us, and sometimes even beautiful and sublime, obviously thanks to the infinity of reason we possess, which allows us to trace its mark in the finite world we inhabit, but also thanks to the fact that reason is in a perishable body. I claim that, in Kant's view, it is the human dying body that makes the finite life of the temporal experience of an infinite reason interesting. As a consequence, I argue that, according to Kant – and similar to Williams – finitude, as a predicate of humanity, even though connected with the denial of infinity, is, at the same time, linked with the affirmation of life as the possibility of subjective perception and the subjective sensation of pleasure, which is the prerequisite for the aesthetic states of the beautiful and the sublime, of respect and compassion, and all other subjective feelings that are withheld from a pure, even if admittedly infinite and immortal, rational being, like God.

1. A question of life and death: the contemporary philosophical debate

Problems of vagueness are always connected to the definition of the term 'life'. It is difficult to respond unequivocally to the question 'when does a human life begin?', since, in doing so, different considerations come into play, such as how to view the state of the embryo or how to determine the moment of consciousness. Likewise, it is challenging to provide a definitive answer to the question 'when does a human life end?', as this requires us to consider similar issues, well known to the researchers on euthanasia evaluating, among others, certain vegetative medical states.⁵

Regarding the definition of the concepts relating to the beginning (birth) and end (death) of life, Derek Parfit reminds us that, in addition to the definitional difficulties related to vagueness, there are further challenges related to the specific orientations of human nature towards caring about the future in a way significantly different from how we relate to the past. In this regard, Parfit notes that, during our lives, the 'being born earlier', i.e., the thought of being born earlier than we actually were and thus anticipating the date of our birth (comparable to postponing our death), matters much less to us than the possibility of postponing our death.⁶ This tendency seems to be due to the fact that humans often think of death in a somewhat 'Lucretian' manner, i.e. as something that deprives us of possible experiences – whereas we do not think in a similar way of a life missed before our birth as,

⁵ Studies dedicated to the topic of what happens after death is even more variegated. See, among these many studies, S. Scheffler: *Death and the Afterlife*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013.

⁶ Cf. D. Parfit: *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984. On this note, cf. also A. L. Brueckner and J. M. Fischer: "Why Is Death Bad?". In: J. M. Fischer (ed.): *The Metaphysics of Death*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, pp. 221-229 (first published in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 50 (1986), pp. 213-223), here in particular pp. 228: "If death occurs in the future, then it is a deprivation of something to which we look forward and about which we care – *future* experienced goods. [...] Death deprives us of something we care about, whereas prenatal nonexistence deprives us of something to which we are indifferent".

possibly, 'our' life.⁷ Parfit suggests replacing the statement 'when I'll be dead' with a statement like 'when there'll be no more direct relations between my present experiences and future experiences'.⁸ Still, in the enunciation of both these sentences, a feeling of a certain kind is invariably evoked: the feeling aroused by the perception that a certain experience, now possible, will no longer be so. And this perception makes thinking about the future without 'us' depressing, to some extent.

All these considerations notwithstanding, it is still not necessarily to be excluded that mortality could be considered as a good. Nor, as Montaigne already observed, is it necessary to stubbornly desire to continue living, especially in cases where we are aware that the life that awaits us will likely be something bad.⁹

If we now set aside the question of the greater or lesser importance of directing our interest to the time before the beginning or after the end of our life and instead return to the problem of defining the concept of 'human life', a strategy that seems to pull us from the troubles concerning the vagueness of a definition is to pose a different question to resolve the problem. The new question to answer would be, for instance, 'what is a person?' In this way, we could limit our analysis to a particular type of life, i.e., conscious life, and further narrow down the concept of a person by referring to the conscious beginning of their life as birth (and, correspondingly, to the last conscious moment of a person's life, for defining death). However, it has often been noted that, even in this case, the problem of vagueness remains – albeit somewhat circumscribed – when we consider how to define the 'death of the person'.¹⁰ To find a non-vague definition, we would need to make a clear distinction between at least three levels: dying, being dead, and the actual death. The first term, 'dying', indicates the process by which one arrives at a certain final result. This result is thus represented by the second term, i.e., 'being dead'. While we may achieve a certain precision with these two terms, the third and final term, i.e., 'death', brings vagueness back. Though it does indicate the moment when a person becomes dead, it does not seem to denote a specific part of the person's life, nor the subsequent state of being dead (i.e., the state one is in after death).¹¹

⁷ Cf. D. Parfit: *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984.

⁸ Cf. note above, and the classical article by Parfit: "Personal Identity". In: *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. 80, No. 1, pp. 3-27.

⁹ Cf. the famous motto by M. de Montaigne, "to philosophise is to learn to die" (M. de Montaigne: *Essais*, livres I et II. Bordeaux: Millanges 1580). In fictional term, Swift renders Montaigne's motto in Lemuel Gulliver's attitude on the isle of Luggnagg with the Struldbruggs. Cf. J. Swift: *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a captain of several ships*. London, Motte: 1726, in particular Part III, Chapter X: *The Luggnaggians commended. A particular description of the Struldbruggs, with many conversations between the author and some eminent persons upon that subject* (pp. 214-223): "I cried out as in a rapture: 'Happy nation where every child hath at least a chance for being immortal! Happy people who enjoy so many living examples of ancient virtue and have masters ready to instruct them in the wisdom of all former ages! But happiest beyond all comparison are those excellent Struldbruggs, who, being born exempt from that universal calamity of human nature, have their minds free and disengaged, without the weight and depression of spirits caused by the continual apprehension of death'" (p. 215). Gulliver is contradicted by the facts: "That the system of living contrived by me was unreasonable and unjust because it supposed a perpetuity of youth, health, and vigour, which no man could be so foolish to hope, however extravagant he might be in his wishes. That the question therefore was not whether a man would choose to be always in the prime of youth, attended with prosperity and health, but how he would pass a perpetual life under all the usual disadvantages which old age brings along with it" (p. 219).

¹⁰ Cf. S. E. Rosenbaum: "How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus". In: J. M. Fischer (ed.): *The Metaphysics of Death*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, pp. 119-134, in particular pp. 119-121.

¹¹ See again S. E. Rosenbaum: "How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus". In: J. M. Fischer (ed.): *The Metaphysics of Death*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, pp. 119-134, in particular pp. 119-121.

Through these preliminary considerations, I have aimed to render the limits of my analysis overt. However, within these boundaries, I believe a philosophically appropriate question about the meaningfulness (and goodness, indeed) of the finiteness of a mortal life can still be posed. Despite the difficulty of arguing in an analytically precise manner – given the extreme complexity of aspects connected to the ‘life’-phenomenon that makes it nearly impossible to achieve the clarity necessary for philosophical inquiry – I consider it appropriate to search for a possible (albeit imprecise) argument about the meaningfulness of the transience of life, to the extent that this inquiry is essentially tied to the investigation of the human being and its existence.

1.1 Williams’ Makropulos case

In recent decades, there has been a lively discussion on the theme of death, linking it to the boredom of immortality.¹² This debate originates from a now classical intervention by Bernard Williams entitled *The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality*.¹³ Originally delivered as a talk in a lecture series, Williams’ reflections on the tedium of immortality differed from those of the other lecturers, in that Williams was not concerned with the question of whether humans possessed the latent possibility of immortality, but rather with the thesis that it was good that humans were *not* immortal. Williams observed that among the previous speakers, philosophers have always – in one way or another – attempted to establish whether humans can be considered, in a certain way, immortal. Often, this attempt occurred through reference to the immortality of the soul. In contrast, Williams decides to address a totally different theme. He decides to investigate to what extent and how our non-immortality is something good. He noted:

Those among previous lecturers who were philosophers tended [...] to discuss the question whether we are immortal; that is not my subject, but rather what a good thing it is that we are not. Immortality, or a state without death, would be meaningless, I shall suggest; so, in a sense, death gives the meaning to life.¹⁴

In order to defend his suggestion concerning the meaninglessness of immortality from the human perspective, Williams states that he is not to follow the path of the existentialists, but rather to go an independent way:

Some existentialists [...] seem to have said that death was what gave meaning to life, if anything did, just because it was the fear of death that gave meaning to life; I shall not follow them. I shall rather pursue the idea that from facts about human desire and happiness and what a human life is, it follows both that immortality would be,

¹² Among the many studies that have been published in recent years, see at least three special issues of journals, i.e., *Death and Dying*. Special Issue of *The Monist*, vol. 76/2 (1993); *Life and Death: Metaphysics and Ethics*. Special Issue of *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 24 (2000); and *Der Trost der Endlichkeit*. Numero speciale of *der blaue reiter – Journal für Philosophie*, vol. 44/2 (2019). Moreover, cf. the monograph by F. Feldman: *Confrontations with the Reaper: A Philosophical Study of the Nature and Value of Death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992; J. F. Rosenberg: *Thinking Clearly about Death*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall 1983; S. Luper: *The Philosophy of Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009.

¹³ B. Williams: “The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality”. In: *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973, pp. 82-100. Williams refer to the piece by K. Čapek: *The Makropulos Secret* (1922). Translated by Y. Synek Graff and R. T. Jones. In: *Towards the Radical Center: A Karel Čapek Reader*. Ed. by P. Kussi. Highland Park: Catbird Press 1990, pp. 10-77 (orig. ed.: *Rossumovi univerzální roboti* 1920).

¹⁴ B. Williams, “The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality”. In: *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973, pp. 82-100, here p. 82. For a first view of the legacy of the paper, see M. Burley: “‘The End of Immortality!’ Eternal Life and the Makropulos Debate”. In: *The Journal of Ethics*, vol. 19 (2015), pp. 305-321.

where conceivable at all, intolerable, and that (other things being equal) death is reasonably regarded as an evil.¹⁵

Three points have to be underlined here, which are linked to the fundamental concepts of 'desire', 'happiness', and 'individual identity'. Firstly, Williams states that "the reasons which a human being would have for avoiding death are [...] grounded in desires [...] which one has".¹⁶ But he observes that "there is no desirable or significant property which life would have more of [...] if we lasted for ever". In fact, he argues that *boredom* would occur, and it would be "connected with the fact that everything that could happen and make sense to one particular human being", at a certain point, had already happened to him or her.¹⁷

The problem related to this characterisation of life, therefore, lies in the inability of the appetitive faculty to renew its tension towards future alternatives: the desire on which life itself is based would cease to exist at some point. Williams is concerned, in the first place, with the cessation of a specific mental faculty: that of desire. (Unlike Williams, Shelly Kagan refers instead to the impossibility, through death, of actualising all our mental capacities in general since the essential dimension of life consists in making mental faculties possible. According to Kagan, there is no need to refer to a physical or metaphysical correlate, brain or soul, in order to further and provide answers for the discussion on the philosophy of death. The entire discussion can simply be reduced to possible activities of the living body – and death lets the activation of faculties cease totally and irreversibly).¹⁸ However, if we focus only on the appetitive faculty, we need to ask: to which desire, in particular, is Williams referring to here? This becomes evident in the specific distinction Williams introduces in connection with the appetitive faculty, and which was later consolidated as a widely accepted and reiterated basic distinction in the debate on death and immortality. The difference in question is that between 'conditional' and 'categorical' desires.

The first category of desires, those of a conditional nature, depends on being alive. In this sense, one may desire not to be treated badly in life and, despite this, simultaneously desire to die. Williams argues, however, that a second category of desires does not depend on being alive. As mentioned above, he calls this type of desires 'categorical' and defines them as desires that lead to a positive response to the question of whether one wants to remain alive. Desires of a categorical nature *presuppose* wanting to live. They are, for example, the desire to eradicate world hunger – or simply the one to raise children. A person with this second type of desire always and implicitly desires to live to fulfil their categorical desires. Consequently, from the perspective of categorical desiring, death is always considered something negative, insofar as it thwarts this type of desire. However, according to Williams, and perhaps seemingly paradoxical at first glance, it is precisely death that makes these same categorical desires meaningful, insofar as it makes their realisation necessary at a

¹⁵ B. Williams, "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality". In: *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973, p. 82.

¹⁶ B. Williams, "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality". In: *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973, p. 82.

¹⁷ B. Williams, "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality". In: *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973, p. 82.

¹⁸ Shelly Kagan is one of the best received contemporary authors on the topic of mortality. See S. Kagan: *Death*. New Haven: Yale University Press 2012, where he makes it clear that his aim is to deal with death as the cessation of functions of both body and mind, without distinguishing – as one might do – between these two sets of functions, and thus setting aside the scientific level and the various problems associated with it. He deals instead with a body that functions in a certain way and then stops doing it (cf. chapter VIII of the above quoted monograph). A further valuable study on these topics is the less recent collection by P. Edwards (ed.): *Immortality*. New York: Macmillan 1992.

specific moment in time that cannot be endlessly postponed. According to the interpretation provided by Williams, immortality would annihilate the formation of genuine categorical desires, destroying the very basis of desiring.¹⁹ Living forever would nullify the categoricity of wanting to save the world, eradicate hunger, raise children: in infinity, these actions will certainly happen at a certain point, and there would be no categorical desire to undertake these actions here and now.

Within Williams' arguments, reflections on desiring are certainly the most important. However, as mentioned, Williams goes beyond the analysis of desires and considers two additional aspects. One of them is happiness. Williams states that happiness is, by definition, incompatible with boredom, and that this alone is enough to exclude the idea of immortality as something good within a human life, insofar as it is a bringer of boredom.²⁰

The third aspect is linked to desiring and happiness. It is the question of personal identity. It should be myself, the subject which is (i) desiring and (ii) being happy. Williams states:

Some philosophers have pictured an eternal existence as occupied in something like intense intellectual enquiry. Why that might seem to solve the problem, at least for them, is obvious. The activity is engrossing, self-justifying, affords, as it may appear, endless new perspectives, and by being engrossing enables one to lose oneself. It is that last feature that supposedly makes boredom unthinkable, by providing something that is, in that earlier phrase, at every moment totally absorbing. But if one is totally and perpetually absorbed in such an activity, and loses oneself in it, then as those words suggest, we come back to the problem of satisfying the conditions that it should be me who lives for ever and that the eternal life should be in prospect of some interest.²¹

This conclusion leads to reflections on different possible models of immortality. One might firstly think of a preliminary model, according to which a certain individual of a certain kind, for example, understood exclusively as a body (an individual bodily support), lives infinitely in an indefinite series of different lives. If this were the meaning of immortality, neither the first nor the second condition of Williams seems satisfied. In fact, there does not appear to be a conscious identity between different lives (= (i) that "it should be me who lives forever"), nor does the second condition seem satisfied (= (ii) that "eternal life should be in prospect of some interest" of mine), to the extent that the future 'persons' living 'future lives' will not be identical to the present person, and therefore, 'their' interests will not be the same as the present one's interests. This is why one should rather speak, in this case, of 'their' interests, the future persons' interests, rather than 'mine'.²²

¹⁹ On the distinction between annihilation and the process of emptying desires, cf. D. B. Suits: "Why Death Is Not Bad for the One Who Died". In: D. Benatar (ed.): *Life, Death, and Meaning. Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions*. London: Rowman & Littlefield 2010, pp. 283-302 (first published in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 38/1 (2001), pp. 69-84.

²⁰ In his essay, Williams deals with the concept of happiness diffusely. However, in the context of my analysis, the concepts of happiness and boredom are relevant only accidentally. This is the reason for the tight treatment of these topics in the corpus of my text.

²¹ B. Williams, "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality". In: *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973, p. 84. Williams's idea consists in focusing on the human side, instead of dealing with all metaphysically possible options. This is the same proposal we find in Ernst Tugendhat: *Anthropologie statt Metaphysik*. München, Beck 2007.

²² In this regard, McMahan refers to "psychological connectedness" – see J. McMahan, "Death and the Value of Life". In: J. M. Fischer (ed.): *The Metaphysics of Death*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, pp. 233-266, first published in *Ethics* 99/1 (1988), pp. 32-61, in particular p. 261: "Psychological connectedness [...] provides the principal basis for egoistic concern about the future. Psychological connectedness, however, is a matter of degree. This suggests that the weaker the psychological connections between a person now and the same person later, the weaker his grounds will be now for egoistic concern about his later life".

Taking into account a second possible model, in which immortality is the expression of the continuity of a person who has an interest in the present that remains the same interest even in the future, one is not allowed to refer to an 'individual' living an indefinite series of lives. In such a case, living forever would no longer be desirable to the extent that living other lives, in which a different interest is realised than the one I am interested in in the present life, is not an appealing prospect (that would not be *my* genuine interest). In relation to this second model, it could be said that the first condition stated by Williams (i.e., (i) that 'it should be me who lives forever') would be realized, but certainly not the second condition (i.e., (ii) that 'eternal life should be in prospect of some interest' of mine). The individual human subject, adapted in this immortal way, would no longer seem to be an individual, a subject, with 'its' own genuine interests the whole time.²³

As a conclusion, it has to be noted, furthermore, that Williams does not aim to argue that immortality is inevitably and unequivocally negative for humans – something downright bad. His purpose is rather to argue that eternal life is not desirable for a human being – for Williams, experiences associated with being human are always definable in terms of desirable experiences.

Based on Williams' reflections, I believe we can thus hold that the fact that immortality is not desirable for humans is linked to the fact that human subjective experience is unthinkable except as finite human subjective experience within a finite human life. Human experience in life, a subjective, temporal, and finite experience, is the type of experience desirable for living humans: it is in the interest of humans to preserve themselves as finite subjects of life experience.

Martha Nussbaum also reflects these themes of thoughts and seems to approach Williams' arguments on the meaningfulness (if not the goodness) of being mortal. Nussbaum particularly emphasises that the intensity and the way humans dedicate themselves to their activities acquire a distinctive dimension and meaning precisely *because* of the awareness of the finiteness of their opportunities to realise their activities: this is linked to a choice we must make, and it is a choice tied to the here and now – well-defined, structured, and bound within time:

The intensity and dedication with which very many human activities are pursued cannot be explained without reference to the awareness that our opportunities are finite, that we cannot choose these activities indefinitely many times. In raising a child, in cherishing a lover, in performing a demanding task of work or thought or artistic creation, we are aware, at some level, of the thought that each of these efforts is structured and constrained by time.²⁴

²³ Kagan, again close to the kind of arguments put forward by Williams, emphasises how the fact that a person exists and that person is metaphysically the same after a million years but no longer remembers things, as memory begins to fade gradually, is not important from a personal point of view. He suggests putting the problem in the form of a question: 'is immortality something that would be nice to have forever?' On the one hand, if we think of the immortal person like the person we are now at this moment, one is bound to sink into boredom. The only way to avoid this problem would that of becoming lobotomised. But this is certainly not desirable for the person I am now. On the other hand, if we solve the obstacle of boredom through progressive memory loss and radical personality changes, we probably avoid the risk of boredom, but the life lying ahead does not look like something I would want for myself now. See S. Kagan: *Death*. New Haven: Yale University Press 2012, in particular chapter XI.

²⁴ Cf. M. Nussbaum: "Mortal Immortals: Lucretius on Death and the Voice of Nature". In: *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994, pp. 192-238, in particular p. 229.

Against these sorts of possible explanations in favour of the positivity of a finite life, other thinkers have argued in a symmetrically divergent direction. In the following, I will address the objections of three of them, i.e., those by John Martin Fischer, Connie Moscati, and Thomas Nagel.

1.2 Against Williams: Fischer, Moscati, Nagel

The first of these thinkers, John M. Fischer, responds directly to Williams's concerns, stating in the first place that the loss of the 'individual identity'-condition, the third one mentioned by Williams, is not prejudicated by an immortal status, to the extent that an activity, even the most engaging, does not make it impossible to speak of an individual. At most, in his opinion, it just sidelines all kinds of egoistic consideration. In fact, in this regard, Fischer believes that, at most, something will be 'lost' in the sense that one will not be 'narcissistically focused' on oneself:

An engrossing and absorbing activity causes one to 'lose oneself' in something in the sense that one is not *self-absorbed*. But it is quite another matter to claim that the experiences involved in such activities are themselves not *one's own*. Even though one has 'lost oneself' in something in the sense that one is not narcissistically focused even in part on oneself, it does not follow that one cannot look at a future with such experiences genuinely *one's own future*.²⁵

According to Fischer, from this it does not follow the necessity of thinking of such a future as a future that the individual (whose interests have completely changed) cannot think of now, in the present, as his future. And not even the second condition, regarding happiness, is affected from the possibility of an immortal life. Then, even in such a life it would be possible to think of possible repeatable pleasures that do not exhaust themselves once and for all if experienced for the first time.²⁶

Connie Rosati is of a similar opinion, adding an additional nuance to Fischer's objections against Williams. In fact, for Rosati, immortality could become undesirable only for a certain circle of people who have limited interests and, generally, have always had a tendency to get bored.²⁷

²⁵ J. M. Fischer: "Why Immortality is Not So Bad". In: *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 2/2 (1994), pp. 257-270, in particular p. 81. On this point, cf. also J. Perry: *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*. Indianapolis: Hackett 1978.

²⁶ Cfr. J. M. Fischer – B. Mitchell-Yellin: "Immortality and Boredom". In: *The Journal of Ethics*, vol. 18/4 (2014), pp. 353-372, in particular p. 358: "It is almost as though Williams and other proponents of the view that we would lose all our categorical desires and associated projects in an immortal life are in the grips of a problematic metaphor. They sometimes seem to think of the relevant projects as though they were books in a library that contains a large but finite number of books. The idea is that, given an infinite amount of time, a human being could read all the books in the library. In the grip of this metaphor, one might think that eventually human beings would run out of projects – either other-focused or self-focused".

²⁷ Cf. C. S. Rosati: "The Makropulos Case Revisited: Reflections on Immortality and Agency". In: B. Bradley – F. Feldman – J. Johansson (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 355-390, here in particular p. 366: "Of course, some people do have a limited capacity for enjoyment and especially rigid aims and interests. But nothing necessarily stops even those of a more 'unfortunate' character from continuing to enjoy their narrow interests. Perhaps the moral, then, is not that extended existence would be undesirable simply because of what it is to have a human character and live a human life, but that it would be undesirable for those whose circumstances will be seriously impoverished or for those who have, as a matter of individual characters, both limited interests and a tendency to become easily and intolerably bored".

In contrast to Fischer and Rosati, Thomas Nagel's objection to the argumentative strategy adopted by Williams is what is usually referred to as the 'deprivation argument'.²⁸ Nagel argues for a thesis diametrically opposed to that of Williams, insofar as dying is, according to Nagel, always a harm to the one who dies.²⁹

Nagel begins by recalling how death carries an eminently *subjective* significance. From a fairly distant point of view,

From far enough outside, our birth seems accidental, our life pointless, our death unimportant, but from the inside, our life seems monstrously important and death catastrophic.³⁰

In contrast to the objective point of view, according to which anyone's death is part of the general cycle of biological renewal that is an inseparable element of organic life, a fact that it does not make sense to deplore, Nagel stresses the extreme importance of considering death from the perspective of the subject who is alive and from the perspective of his existence. He continues:

if we try to do justice to the fact that death is the ultimate loss for everybody, it isn't clear what the objective standpoint is to do with the thought of this perpetual cataract of catastrophe in which the world comes to an end hundreds of times a day. We cannot regard all those deaths with the interest with which their subjects regard them: sheer emotional overload prevents it, as anyone who has tried to summon a feeling adequate to an enormous massacre knows. The objective standpoint simply cannot accommodate at its full subjective value the fact that everyone, oneself included, inevitably dies. There really is no way to eliminate the radical clash of standpoints in relation to death.³¹

Nagel's conclusions in *The View from Nowhere* are far away from Williams' ones and more similar to and characteristic of the way of arguing in favour of the deprivation thesis, according to which the incommensurability of goods that death takes with it is due to the subject's point of view. However (and in this case also similar to Williams' argumentation) in *Mortal Questions* Nagel also underlines that the finite experiences connected to our being human are desirable in themselves, in that he observes that the additional positive value of life is provided by the experience itself, rather than by any of its contents, since what we find desirable in life are certain states, conditions, or types of activity, and we cannot live a human life without energy and attention, and without making choices, which show that we take some things more seriously than others.³²

It is on this point that contemporary discussion finally reaches an agreement: the finite experience made possible by a mortal human life is to be considered a good. In what follows, I aim to show how exactly this particular point finds an accordance in modern

²⁸ On the privation thesis, cf. A. L. Brueckner and J. M. Fischer: "Why Is Death Bad?". In: J. M. Fischer (ed.): *The Metaphysics of Death*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, pp. 221-229 (first published in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 50 (1986), pp. 213-223. Here in particular p. 222: 'Death could then be an *experiential blank* and still be a bad thing for an individual. And one plausible explanation of why this is so is that death (though an experiential blank) is *deprivation* of the good things of life. That is, when life is, on balance, good, then death is bad insofar as it robs one of this good: if one had died later than one actually did, then one would have had more of the good things of life'.

²⁹ Nagel's critique against Williams was published for the first time in T. Nagel: "Death". In: *Nous*, vol. 4/1 (1970), pp. 73-80. This article has been collected in the book T. Nagel: *Mortal Question*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979. For a further treatment of the question, see also T. Nagel: *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986.

³⁰ T. Nagel: *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986, p. 209.

³¹ T. Nagel: *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986, p. 230.

³² Cf. T. Nagel: *Mortal Question*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979.

philosophy, in particular in some of the reflections by Immanuel Kant, who, one may argue, might rightfully be given a voice in the contemporary debate on the philosophy of death.³³

2. Some help from the past: Kant on the infinite life of reason and the positivity of the finitude of human life

Kant's best-known reflections on the concept of life and a 'living thing' can be found in the third *Critique*, specifically in the second part, i.e., the *Critique of Teleological Judgement*, where he accounts for the concept of an organism. This concept is presented as a product of nature, within which the different parts of an organic being combine to form a unity in a whole. Kant claims that the organism is to be regarded as a 'natural purpose' (and, as a consequence of this, the mechanistic view of the natural world must thus be reconciled with this teleological one). In that unity, which is nature, each organism as a part serves simultaneously as cause and effect in a continuous chain.³⁴ However, most of Kant's reflections on death are to be found in his precritical writings.

2.1 Kant on death

In his earlier writings, Kant deals with the concept of 'life' making very few references to the term 'death'.³⁵ One of these rare mentions is to be found in the essay *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* from 1786, where Kant talks about the foreboding of death, linking it with the consciousness of temporality that characterises human existence. Kant writes that human beings, even in the midst of a troubled life, always and anew turn with fear to what will inevitably befall all other animals as well (without these last beings being disturbed by it): the end of their life, death.³⁶ In doing so, human beings incessantly connect their fear of death to the very use of their reason. According to Kant, humans gain indeed awareness of death through reason, but it is also through death as the termination of realised human reason itself that this awareness becomes something negative for them. Reason makes them aware of the end, but without reason, this awareness would be lacking – and thus also the

³³ On this point, suggestive proposals in connection with correlate positions have been done by Heiner F. Klemme, who recently dealt with the more general problem of the self-preservation of reason in a recent monograph entitled *Die Selbsterhaltung der Vernunft. Kant und die Modernität seines Denkens*. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann Verlag 2023.

³⁴ Cf. in particular Kant: KU, AA 5, §§ 64-65. Kant's works are quoted as usual according to the Academy edition, i.e. Immanuel Kant: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Berlin: Reimer/de Gruyter 1900ff. On the concept of organism in the third *Critique*, see, among the numerous studies, at least H. Ginsborg: "Kant on Understanding Organisms as Natural Purposes". In: E. Watkins (ed.): *Kant and the Sciences*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2001, pp. 231-254; P. Guyer: "Organisms and the Unity of Science". In: E. Watkins (ed.): *Kant and the Sciences*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2001, pp. 259-180; P. Huneman (ed.): *Understanding Purpose. Kant and the Philosophy of Biology*. Rochester (NY): University of Rochester Press 2007; A. Breitenbach: "Laws in Biology and the Unity of Nature". In: M. Massimi – A. Breitenbach (eds.): *Kant and the Laws of Nature*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press 2017, pp. 237-255.

³⁵ There are nearly no secondary sources on the concept of 'death' in Kant's philosophy. But see T. Rosefeldt: „Tod“. In: M. Willaschek – J. Stolzenberg – G. Mohr – S. Bacin (eds.): *Kant-Lexikon*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2015, pp. 2296-2297 (and the lemma dedicated to the concept of 'life', as well, i.e., A. Rosas: „Leben“. In: M. Willaschek – J. Stolzenberg – G. Mohr – S. Bacin (eds.): *Kant-Lexikon*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2015, pp. 1375-1379).

³⁶ Here is the full quotation: "[Human beings], after a laborious life, still foresaw with fear in the background of the painting that which, indeed, inevitably befalls all animals, yet without troubling them, namely, death, and seemed to refer to themselves the use of reason, which causes them all these evils, and to make it a crime". For a different treatment of the way in which animals represent themselves death, see, among others, A. Norcross: "The Significance of Death for Animals". In: B. Bradley – F. Feldman – J. Johansson (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Death*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 465-474.

cause of the fear of the end of the use of reason itself would be lacking. Consequently, Kant comes to the conclusion that the use of reason is tantamount to a crime, because the possibility of exercising reason makes explicit the dreadfulness of death.³⁷ Kant believes that the evil tied to death lies in the limited duration and brevity of the use of reason, noting at the same time that we human beings would be terrible judges, if we wanted to prolong “a play which is a constant grappling with nothing but troubles”.³⁸ This is the paradox of the human connection with death:

One cannot really blame a childish power of judgement for fearing death without loving life, and its being hard for it to suffer through every day with even minimal contentment, yet for never having enough of these days not to want to repeat this calamity again.³⁹

Apart from this quotation, there are no further direct references to the term ‘death’ in Kant’s so-called ‘critical’ period. Obviously, the topic of immortality is something that is diffusively dealt with in the context of the second *Critique* – and it is, in general, a central topic of the last decades of the eighteenth century. However, this is exactly the problem within Kant’s work (and the works of many thinkers at Kant’s time), when we try to read it from the perspective of the recent problematisations of contemporary philosophy of death: as a genuine philosophical problem, the idea of human death is not dealt with if not in the context of the theoretical thinkability of a life of reason after human death. And, evidently, this is a completely different problem from the one consisting in the necessity of human death – beyond a life of pure reason. Death, as the end of life, is certainly framed at least in terms of a final purpose along with other purposes of nature in the third *Critique* – however, Kant never discusses it within the context of natural ends.⁴⁰ There is no mention of this thought, which is avoided, just as Kant avoids discussing the reasons why humans possess faculties that allow them to live a life of reason and knowledge.

However, there are further reflections on the concepts of life and death dating from the so-called precritical period. In the *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* from 1763, Kant observes that finitude and, therefore, the temporality of human life, necessarily include mortality. He notes that “if I posit the infinity of God, the predicate of mortality is cancelled by it, and it is cancelled because mortality contradicts infinity”.⁴¹ Mortality is an objectively real concept that characterises the condition of being human within a limited time. Human time is finite and limited, and immortality does not belong to the human being as a sensible and finite rational being. Only to God, as a pure and non-sensible rational being, can the predicate of immortality be attributed. In contrast, human reason is, by definition, intrinsically sensualised, embodied in time, becoming

³⁷ Cf. Kant: *Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, AA 8: 113.

³⁸ Kant: *Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, AA 8: 122.

³⁹ Kant: *Muthmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, AA 8: 122. See, on this point, the joke, often quoted in contemporary essays on the philosophy of death, by Woody Allen in *Annie Hall*: “Two elderly women are at a Catskills mountain resort, and one of ‘em says: ‘Boy, the food at this place is really terrible’. The other one says, ‘Yeah, I know, and such ... small portions’. Well, that’s essentially how I feel about life. Full of loneliness and misery and suffering and unhappiness, and it’s all over much too quickly.”

⁴⁰ Cf. B. Recki: „Metaphysik als Lehre von den letzten Dingen: Kant über Leben und Tod“. In: B. Recki: *Die Vernunft, ihre Natur, ihr Gefühl und der Fortschritt. Aufsätze zu Immanuel Kant*. Paderborn: Mentis 2006, pp. 126-142, in particular p. 136.

⁴¹ Kant: *Versuch den Begriff der negativen Größen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen*, AA 2: 203. But see also Kant: *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels oder Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes, nach Newtonischen Grundsätzen abgehandelt* (1755), in particular AA 1: 317.

temporal and finite through its encounter with sensibility in its birth within a body. The human way of experiencing implies the finitude and limitations of the life of a rational being that is necessarily, simultaneously, sensible.

The human faculty of desire with its worldly activity is made possible only by an embodiment of reason in a mortal human.⁴² This is testified by one of Kant's few direct mentions and explicit discussions of the concept of human life and human death in relation to the immortality of the soul.⁴³ Kant claims that the immortality of the soul as substance is unverifiable because this "supposed substance [...] could be transformed into nothing, although not by disintegration, but by a gradual diminution (*remissio*) of all its powers".⁴⁴ A similar thought by Kant is already contained in one of his earliest writings:

The very mechanism by which the animal or man lives and grows up finally brings him death when growth is complete. For, since the nutritive juices, which serve to maintain it, no longer simultaneously expand the canals to which they attach themselves and increase their contents, they constrict their internal cavity, the circulation of the fluids is inhibited, the animal curls up, becomes obsolete and dies.⁴⁵

These considerations point to the fact that the spiritual function of human reason depends on physical-sensual forces, i.e., on life. When these forces diminish, the spiritual function of reason transforms into nothing. This state is followed by death as the "lifelessness that follows life".⁴⁶

Life, as the condition of every experience, must be presupposed as a precondition for every subjective perception. Similar to what happens in Williams' reflections, for Kant as well we can assess that categorical desiring and subjective experiencing are the reasons why individual human subjects can coherently desire the finitude of their own lives. Only through temporality reason is born in a body and lives in the world, and only temporally limited sensible subjects can attribute value to their experiences, which can be nothing but temporal. Only through this finitude human beings can subjectively experience pleasure. Observing the starry heavens above us, we, as sensible rational subjects, are allowed to perceive them not only as a physical magnitude but also, at the same time, as an object of admiration. Only a subjective, sensible, and temporally limited perception allows us humans to make experience of the sky and the world we live in a magnificent spectacle, even "the most glorious spectacle" of all, as Kant famously states in the second *Critique*.⁴⁷

2.2 Kant on human life

If we now shift our attention from the discussion concerning the concept of death to the one dedicated to that of life in Kant's work, the proximity between his positions and the ones, mentioned above, by contemporary readers on the philosophy of death becomes even more evident. Some suggestions are to be found in the context of the explanation of Kant's distinction between *homo noumenon*, that is, the pure rational being in the immortality of its reason on the one hand, and *homo phaenomenon*, that is, the sensible rational being in

⁴² On this topic, see A. Nuzzo: *Ideal Embodiment. Kant's Theory of Sensibility*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 2008.

⁴³ See the way in which Kant, in the first *Critique*, approaches Mendelssohn's *Phädon*, i.e., Moses Mendelssohn: *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele in drey Gesprächen*. Berlin/Stettin: Nicolai 1767. But see also Kant: *Die Frage, ob die Erde veralte, physikalisch erwogen* (1754), AA 1: 198.

⁴⁴ Kant: KrV, B 414.

⁴⁵ Kant: *Die Frage, ob die Erde veralte, physikalisch erwogen* (1754), AA I: 198.

⁴⁶ Kant: AA 21: 100. On this note, cf. C. T. Powell: "Kant, Elanguescence, and Degrees of Reality". In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Dec. 1985), pp. 199-217.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kant: KpV, AA 5: 162, 28-30.

its animality and mortality, on the other hand. This analysis will account for some positive connotations of the temporally limited existence of reason and its transformation into a human body.

In the context of this dualistic model, life is to be considered the condition of the possibility for the realisation of reason's autonomy through human freedom. In other words, the self-legislation of reason expressed in the moral law can be concretely realised in the human world only through the embodiment of reason itself in the human, so that freedom becomes real, and a moral action can be acted. Life is defined by Kant as "faculty to act in accordance with one's representations"⁴⁸ and thus constitutes the presupposition for the actualisation of the other faculties of the human mind. The possession of mental capacities for the possible activation of an action distinguishes living bodies from non-living physical bodies. By 'body', Kant generally means everything that is an "object of external sense".⁴⁹ Instead, he generally defines life as

the faculty of a being to act in accordance with laws of the faculty of desire. The faculty of desire is a being's faculty to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of the representations.⁵⁰

Within a living human body, Kant distinguishes between two different ways or situations that express the life of the living being. On one hand, Kant claims it is possible to refer to life and the action contained and initiated by the human being as an expression of the perfect rational being, infinite in its possibility of action and existence. In this case, reason, capable of transcending the sensible world and conferring upon the human being an additional citizenship – that of a supersensible world – finds expression in the sensible world. The rational being can be said, in this sense, to be endowed with immortality: in this case, we are dealing with the immortal life of reason. On the other hand, the dimension of animality and sensible corporeality is an expression of the imperfect rational being, whose possibility of action is necessarily limited and finite, as it is embodied in time. The finiteness of the freedom of action is therefore due to the finiteness of the sensible and corporeal rational being, which is faced with a choice. Choice – and freedom – are generated by the birth of reason in a mortal body. The possibility of autonomy, i.e., of submitting oneself to the moral law and of making the law of reason one's own law, independently of the vicissitudes of the sensible world, is only one of the possibilities of the finite rational being, and not a necessity, as it is the case in a perfect rational being, unconditioned by the sensible world and, consequently, infinite in its autonomous action. The mere possibility of realising autonomy (and not its necessary majesty) is due to the fact that, in addition to the law of reason, the human being, which is sensible and bodily, is always simultaneously subject to other laws governing also all other finite beings, i.e., the physical laws of nature as laws regulating every kind of body. It is finite human life, as the birth of the finite rational being, that enriches the immortal life of reason with sensible experiences, making it temporal. How and why this happens is not given for us to know:

The first view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an *animal creature*, which after it has been for a short time provided with vital force (one knows not how) must give back to the planet (a mere speck in the universe) the matter from which it came.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Cf. Kant: MS, AA 6: § 1.

⁴⁹ Cf. the definition of body (*Körper*) in the first *Critique*, i.e., Kant: KrV, A 342.

⁵⁰ See Kant: KpV, AA 5: 9.

⁵¹ See Kant: KpV, AA 5: 289.

The matter that makes up the body of a human being is the same that forms the planet and the universe, and it is this dying body that makes the finite life of the temporal experience of a reason interesting even besides the realisation of autonomy in moral acts.

In the conclusion of the second *Critique*, Kant clearly presents the dualism inherent in human beings, explaining their dual existence in two opposing worlds: the infinite world of reason and the finite world of sensibility. He does this through reference to the starry sky, on the one hand, i.e., the phenomenal world of physical nature around us, and the moral law, on the other hand, i.e., the intelligible and invisible world of reason within the human being.⁵²

The dual nature of the world and of the human being, which Kant epistemologically characterises as the dualism between a world of appearance (where *phenomena* are under the laws of nature and necessity) and an intelligible world (where *noumena* are under the law of freedom), has often been the subject of investigation in the history of Western philosophy. However, it is often forgotten that, despite the intelligible world of things in themselves constituting the foundation of our belonging to a life of reason, which distinguishes us human beings from all other worldly phenomena and elevates us above mere animality, this same intelligible world constitutes an unattainable ideal for finite human beings. It is necessary to remember, then, that human life is something less and something more than our existence as pure rational being and the immortality of reason itself.

Finitude, as a predicate of humanity, is connected with the denial of infinity. However – similar to Williams’ argumentations and the ones proposed in the contemporary debate on the philosophy of death –, at the same time, it is also linked with the affirmation of life as the possibility of subjective perception and the subjective sensation of pleasure, which is the prerequisite for the aesthetic states of the beautiful and the sublime, of respect and compassion, and all other subjective feelings that are withheld from a pure, even if admittedly infinite and immortal, rational being, like God.

It is not eternity and immortality, but it is precisely the finitude of life that allows the sensible rational being to experience a world where desires and subjective feelings, together with the possibility of grasping the beautiful and the realised moral good, exist.

As the aforementioned passage from the conclusion of the second *Critique* shows, we are allowed to refer to our existence as intelligible beings, but we are also allowed to recognise our place in the world of appearances regulated by the laws of nature in such a way that the sensible natural world becomes subjectively important for us. It is our being in time and our finitude that show us this importance.⁵³ Our reason, as embodied, to-be-finite reason, makes explicit our visible connection to the world of phenomena and simultaneously provides us with an additional clue regarding a world that has true infinity, revealed by our moral personality. The phenomenal world becomes interesting for us, and sometimes even beautiful and sublime, obviously thanks to the infinity of reason we possess, which allows us to trace its mark in the finite world we inhabit, but also thanks to the fact that reason is in a

⁵² Cf. Kant: KpV, AA 5: 288-289.

⁵³ On this topic, see, of course, § 53 (*Existenzialer Entwurf eines eigentlichen Seins zum Tode*) in M. Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1963, pp. 260 ff. I will not refer to the many studies on Heidegger and death – nonetheless, in the context of the present analysis, see at least J. Young: “Death and Transfiguration: Kant, Schopenhauer and Heidegger on the Sublime”. In: *Inquiry*, vol. 48/2 (2006), pp. 131-144. More interesting and productive results – from an existentialist point of views – are the ones by Miguel de Unamuno (*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida – en los hombres y en los pueblos*. Madrid: Renacimiento 1913) and Albert Camus (*Le mythe de Sisyphe. Essai sur l’absurde*, 1942).

perishable body. Through our desires, feelings, and actions, we thus become aware of an existence in the human world, which is sensible and intelligible at the same time. However, it is not only an aesthetic experience that enriches the finite life of human reason, but also moral experience. In fact, exactly through the embodiment of reason, i.e., through the life of individual reason, the rational legislation of morality as autonomy enters the sensible world as freedom. In the midst of human life, questions arise such as: ‘What ought I to do? How should I conduct my life?’ And we would certainly not have an often almost dramatic urgency to find an answer to these questions, were we not mortal. The realisation of the law of the immortal reason of the noumenal human being in the existence of the phenomenal, mortal human being is urgent because time of action is scarce. We are finite human beings, and death makes the moral law an element that also arouses our earthly interest. Fundamentally, the death of the individual is the great problem of conduct in life and of morality.⁵⁴ The rational being, who is also simultaneously a sensible being, confronts its double belonging, both to the intelligible world, which makes morality possible, and to the natural world, which makes its morality achievable and renders subjective, moral as well as aesthetic experiences, desirable.⁵⁵ Mortality, the passing of time, and the finitude of life can be viewed from a different, human perspective: from the aesthetic perspective of a human subject, of a rational being that is, at the same time, a sensuous being. Paraphrasing Kant, this is what makes the finitude of the mortal life of an embodied reason desirable. And when Kant occasionally defines mortality as the most humiliating assertion that can be made regarding a rational being,⁵⁶ he refers to the humiliation of an infinite will and an infinite reason that has to become finite, sensible, and human. But once this infinite will and infinite reason becomes human, it is a sensibly affected will and an embodied reason. And for this sort of will and reason, in a sensible rational being – that is: the human being – a mortal life is not humiliating: the finite life of reason is rather worthy of being lived, within and precisely thanks to the human limits of experience.

3. Concluding remarks: why mortality counts (i.e., living with death)

⁵⁴ Cf. B. Recki: “Metaphysik als Lehre von den letzten Dingen: Kant über Leben und Tod”. In: B. Recki: *Die Vernunft, ihre Natur, ihr Gefühl und der Fortschritt. Aufsätze zu Immanuel Kant*. Paderborn: Mentis 2006, pp. 126-142, here in particular pp. 130-132.

⁵⁵ Simone de Beauvoir expresses a similar view in the novel *All Men are Mortal*, where she highlights the absurdity of human actions when observed from the perspective of immortality. She does this through her protagonist, Fosca, who, thanks to a potion, becomes immortal and can thus witness the vicissitudes of men and women over the centuries through world history. Fosca’s conclusion about the spectacle of the world is completely disillusioned: in the world, everything repeats into eternity in a senseless manner once the perspective of the infinite is adopted. Life, human actions, become good or bad only because they are chosen, as they cannot be repeated, as the time given to humans is finite, and actions must be realised within the confined space of a finite life: “‘So’, I said, ‘my actions and my virtues have no value for you since I am immortal?’ ‘Yes, that’s right’, said Beatrice. She put a hand on my arm. ‘Listen to this woman singing. Would her song be so moving if it were not destined to die?’ I said, ‘So, it is a curse?’ Beatrice did not answer; there was nothing to answer: it was a curse” (S. de Beauvoir: *Tous les hommes sont mortels*. 1946, my translation). Not only the meaningfulness, but also the goodness of actions depends on their being confined in a determined, finite time. Things that happen in the world, the experiences we have, are experiences, in which we take interest only to the extent that their repeatability is well-defined and not infinitely boundless. It is not absolute happiness that we seek, but we are rather interested in happiness because it is tied to a limited experience, which becomes meaningful as happiness only within a defined time. Several studies are dedicated to the connection between philosophy and (science) fiction with regard to the concept of death. See, e.g., S. R. L. Clark: *How to Live Forever. Science Fiction and Philosophy*. London: Routledge 1995

⁵⁶ Cf. Kant: *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798), AA 7: 99.

In my analysis, I aimed to shed light on some arguments in favour of the thesis that human life's finiteness is something desirable for human beings by supporting some arguments for the goodness of mortality in the contemporary debate on the philosophy of death through a recourse to Kant's philosophy. My goal was to highlight the positive aspects of human mortality, necessary for an embodied reason. In doing so, I wanted to emphasise how mortality, the passing of time, and the finiteness of life can be approached from a different, human perspective: from the aesthetic and moral standpoint of a human individual who, as a sensible rational being, can imbue their mortal life with the desirable characteristics of an existence within its finitude. This leads me to the conclusion that it is not immortality that a human being can consistently desire, but rather the life we are living, here and now. This is just a hint for considering the further idea of directing one's interest not towards an immortal life, but rather towards the meaning of a life that will end with death, a reality with which humans (nowadays still) have to coexist. My intention was to examine the reasons for not regretting the finitude of life – and to find good reasons to defend it.⁵⁷

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⁵⁷ In this sense, there may be no better conclusion than this: "It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste much of it" (Lucio Anneo Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae*, I: 3).

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