

ABSTRACT
MORTALITY AND IMMORTALITY: RECONSIDERING
ANGLO-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES IN LIGHT OF
KIERKEGAARD, HEIDEGGER, AND JONAS

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This dissertation addresses fundamental questions surrounding mortality and does so *existentially*. Of central concern is what it means to be mortal, the value of mortality, how we ought to relate to it, whether immortality is preferable to mortality, and what moral obligations can be derived from our mortality. By engaging thinkers such as Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Jonas, Epicurus, and contemporary anglophone philosophers, this project seeks to challenge prevailing attitudes towards death. Through a meta-philosophical lens, I argue for the value of mortality as a shaper of the meaningfulness of existence, and for the cultivation of what I call ‘genuine mortality consciousness’ (GMC), which serves as the framework against which competing views of mortality and human flourishing are measured.

The project begins with a dissection of Heidegger’s phenomenology of death in *Being and Time*, paying special attention to death’s role as a condition for the possibility of authenticity and its equiprimordial relation to care. Subsequently, Kierkegaard’s notion of ‘becoming subjective’ and his dictum to ‘think death into every moment’ is examined, which reveals how holding onto death in the present moment serves to structure a purposeful life. Together, the work of these two thinkers underpins my concept of GMC, which allows for the introduction of focus and urgency into life. Also addressed is technology’s obfuscation of GMC.

Having provided a framework from which to approach mortality, I transition to a critical analysis of diverse attitudes towards death, including Epicurus’s claim that death is nothing to us, Nagel’s claim that death is bad, and Fischer’s defense of the desirability of immortality, each of which is ultimately rejected. Against Epicurus and Nagel, I argue that GMC provides a model for relating to mortality that is more conducive to human flourishing. Against the desirability of immortality, I utilize the work of Williams to show that an immortal life would lack meaning. Finally, the project culminates with a moral argument against the transhumanist pursuit of life-extension technology. Utilizing Jonas’s ethics of responsibility, I argue that altering our lifespans is not only imprudent, but immoral because of our responsibility to conserve genuine human life.