

Will Postmortal Catholics Have “The Right to Die”?


The Transhumanist and Catholic Perspectives on Death and Immortality

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ABSTRACT The article discusses the transhumanist and Catholic perspectives on death and immortality within the speculation on the rise of a postmortal society, and asks the question if Catholics have the right to reject immortalist technologies. To address this problem, I first outline the ideas and technology leading to the rise of a postmortal society, and accept Richard K. Morgan’s *Altered Carbon* as a counterfactual scenario. Further, the naturalistic and Catholic understandings of death are compared, and it is shown that despite superficial similarities, they are fundamentally different. Finally, I consider insights from the current debates on end-of-life issues, such as euthanasia and the right to die, since some of the reasons and motivations behind choosing to die will be different in the postmortal society. The analysis allows to provide a set of arguments and problems for further consideration when it comes to the rejection of immortalist technologies.

KEYWORDS *Altered Carbon*; Catholicism; death; euthanasia; immortality; naturalism; postmortality; transhumanism

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Poor Death, no match for the mighty altered carbon technologies of data storage and retrieval arrayed against him. Once we lived in terror of his arrival. Now we flirt outrageously with his sombre dignity, and beings like these won't even let him in the tradesman's entrance.

— Richard K. Morgan

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary increase in the interest in immortality technologies leads to the rise of serious reflection on the emergence of the postmortal society, in which suffering, ageing and death would be abolished, completely altering the face of the world in the respect of social organization and self-conceptualization of humanity. Nowadays, mortality and the awareness of it are distinguished as the components of specifically human nature, and their loss would immediately challenge the foundations of the concept of humanity. The advancements in medicine are fueled by the hopes of bio-tech utopia, which reposes on concrete ontological, axiological, anthropological and ethical presuppositions and concepts. It is to be expected that these can be identified and challenged by some groups of different philosophical background, and different notions of good and harm.

Nick Bostrom in his seminal essay “Why I Want to Be A Posthuman When I Grow Up”¹ famously claimed that the desire to live is always stronger than the desire to die, and if one were able to enjoy enduring healthspan, the thanatic drive would be unlikely to appear and would be symptomatic of an illness. And yet, in the same volume expressing an absolutist “pro-life” attitude,² as in many other posthumanist and transhumanist publications, the “right to die” is strongly advocated: in fact, the ideologues of immortality do not expressly wish to abolish human mortality as such, understood as an intrinsic ability to die. What is sought, rather, is the abolition of ageing and involuntary death, or death from natural causes. Therefore, since death should be by choice, it would become difficult to tell apart voluntary death as a free choice of a healthy individual, and non-voluntary death—a result of certain factors limiting individual freedom or pushing people to suicide, e.g. economic factors, variously conceived duties towards others or the adherence to values and the urge for self-expression or taking a stand, like in today's public suicide cases. Therefore, the criteria for permissiveness of

1. Nick Bostrom, “Why I Want to Be a Posthuman When I Grow Up,” in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 33–4.

2. Max More and Natasha Vita-More, eds., *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

death and a consideration if it is possible to talk about “good death” would become of great importance. The notion of euthanasia, understood as “good death,” would not only remain: in a postmortal era all deaths, ideally, should be by design, and the euthanatic culture would bloom.

In the light of the above, many questions may be asked, relating to the end-of-life issues that plague today’s bioethics. While contemporary proponents of euthanasia frequently underline autonomy and self-ownership as legitimizing factors, the freedom to end one’s life in the postmortal society would be seriously curbed. Thus, the questions about the value of death and the freedom to choose death, as well as the conditions that justify such a choice, would be of fundamental importance for the stability of the future society. The meaning and value of death would be predicated on the specific posthuman anthropology, developed likely on the basis of today’s anthropologies.

In further paragraphs I would like to give consideration to the meaning of death in the postmortal society and attempt to answer the questions: is it possible to talk about a good death in such an environment? What are the anthropological assumptions of the new “pro-life” and “pro-death” groups, and what rational arguments can be conceived of for the choice of death in the postmortal society? What are the limitations of the reasons of conscience? To answer these questions, I present a conflict between the pro-immortality and pro-death groups on the basis of Richard K. Morgan’s novel *Altered Carbon* (2002). This leads me to clearly identify the anthropological assumptions that form the fault-line between the two: the naturalistic and utilitarian one and the religious one. Since the religious side (Catholics) is only scantily presented in the novel, and the portrayal is biased, I will try to look behind the teaching they defend and provide arguments for their rejecting immortality. This I intend to do first by discussing what is understood by postmortal condition: philosophy, fiction and actual state of research on the technologies of immortality. Secondly, I compare the naturalistic and Christian anthropology of death and immortality referring to the current teachings of the Catholic Church (as laid out in the Catechism of the Catholic Church) and to the discussion of differences between transhumanism and Christianity presented by Todd T.W. Daly in his contribution to *Religion and Transhumanism* volume (2014), as well as referring to Andrzej Muszala’s presentation of theology of death (2018), and Grzegorz Hołub’s comparison between Fletcher’s naturalism and Wojtyła’s ontological personalism (2016). Thirdly, I draw conclusions from the current euthanasia debate, in which some arguments for choosing to die are presented, and see if they are applicable to the postmortal

society. This discussion encompasses such problems as suicide, the right to die, reasons of conscience, and patient autonomy. All of this leads me to ask the question if Catholics in the Altered Carbon universe have a duty to embrace the physical resurrection or if they are within their rights to refuse on the grounds of faith.

2. THE POSTMORTAL CONDITION

Within the so-called posthumanities—an interdisciplinary field of study, encompassing anthropology, philosophy of science, nature and technology, and sociology—the debate on the “posthuman condition” has rather a long standing and is usually an extension and continuation of the debate on the “postmodern condition.” Its aim is not necessarily to develop a new notion of humanity, but rather to destabilize the existent one. What is more, many posthumanist thinkers simply abandon any attempts to tackle the notion of humanness, continuing the approach criticized by Lyotard: “what *value* is, what *sure* is, what *man* is, these questions are taken to be dangerous and shut away again pretty fast.”³ In fact, the “end product” of the debate, the actual posthuman that would be result of this dissolution, whether in terms of fusing with other beings—the “wide humanity” of Roden⁴—or the creation of non-human people and artificial life, would be markedly different from how we understand people today. It is important to realize that the idea addressed in this article, the radical prolongation of lifespan, does not seem to subscribe to the above attitudes. Rather, it is the product of transhumanist thought, seeking the augmentation of human powers to unprecedented levels, retaining, however, the continuity between human and posthuman, similar to the one between a Neanderthal and homo sapiens, and a child and a parent.

It is frequently agreed that becoming posthuman hinges upon the idea that fundamental, transformative changes introduced in human physical constitution would alter what is considered human nature and lead to such change in the experience of life as to obliterate the difference between human and non-human people.⁵ Obviously, such a radical transformation,

3. Jean Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 1.

4. David Roden, *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* (London: Routledge, 2015). “Wide humanity” is understood as a “socio-technical assemblage,” which means that humans are in relation of co-dependence with “domesticated animals, mobile phones and toothbrushes” *ibid.*, 110–2.

5. Nicholas Agar, *Humanity’s End. Why We Should Reject Human Enhancement* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010); Nicholas Agar, *Truly Human Enhancement* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014); Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002);

even if not resulting in the loss of human nature,⁶ would entail fundamental alterations to what is seen as constitutive of individual identity: the cascading changes would affect memory, family relationships, friendships, age-related roles, religious beliefs, the ability to appreciate and create art, etc. The postmortal condition can definitely be seen as a variety of the posthuman condition—not necessarily because of “mingling”⁷ the human body with other non-human bodies, but essentially because of the changed relation to temporariness.

Human enhancement plans encompass not only physical but also cognitive, emotional and moral modification,⁸ however, the technologies that promise the attainment of superhuman lifespan and healthspan are the most advanced and varied.⁹ The “war on aging,” proclaimed by Aubrey de Grey,¹⁰ the founder of SENS (Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senescence research program), entails multiple strategies: whereas a low-calorie diet or young blood transfusions are perhaps unlikely to introduce radical longevity, the biotechnologies that seek either slowing ageing down or allowing organ exchange or switching between different synthetic bodies could easily be envisioned as technological foundations for the postmortal society.

Major fields of research that can currently be spoken of as harbingers of effective immortality are: telomerase expression enhancement,

Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159–65, doi:10.1215/22011919-3615934; Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Stephen Lilley, *Transhumanism and Society. The Social Debate over Human Enhancement* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013); Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity With Non-Human People* (New York: Verso, 2017).

6. Bauman perceives mortality as the indelible predicament proper to humans, i.e. it can be taken to constitute, at least partially, what can be called “human nature.” What the immotalists seek is not the abolition of mortality, but the abolition of “each particular case of private death.” See Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 6–7, 137–41.

7. After Michel Serres’s “mingled bodies.” See Michel Serres, *The Five Senses. A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

8. Michael Hauskeller, *Mythologies of Transhumanism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

9. Michael Hviid Jacobsen, ed., *Postmortal Society. Towards a Sociology of Immortality* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

10. Immortality Institute, *The Scientific Conquest of Death. Essays on Infinite Lifespans* (Buenos Aires: LibrosEnRed, 2004); More and Vita-More, *The Transhumanist Reader*.

nanotechnology, synthetic biology, cloning, cyborgization, mind upload. In the first case, the length of the telomere nucleotide sequence has been discovered to be linked to the speed of cellular ageing: it is hoped that its stimulation via genetic engineering on the RNA level will lead to the eventual modification of the pace of ageing, rendering it a plastic, reversible process. It holds a promise of “clinical immortality” as well as the choice of desired cellular age by tinkering with the biological clock: stopping and setting it at will. Nanotechnology, also an invasive procedure, would entail infusing the bloodstream with miniature semi-organic nanobots endowed with limited A.I. systems, programmed to repair cellular damage in real time, which would result in constant regeneration and healing of potentially suffered injuries. The development of synthetic organs is already a fact: with the use of genetic coding and 3D-printing it is even possible to produce synthetic living organisms. These organs could serve as an infinite source of replacement parts for humans whose livers or hearts are damaged. Eventually, a full synthetic body could be produced. The intentions here are similar to those behind the cloning experiments: the cloning of primates in China (2018) paves the way for the attempts to obtain cloned bodies that could host a disembodied consciousness. Of course, such parts or full bodies can also be obtained in the form of artificial prostheses.

The belief that consciousness is transferable between different “containers” permeates many of the contemporary strategies pursued in search of immortality—most famously the one of “mind upload,” (a.k.a. mind transfer) proposed by Ray Kurzweil. The initiatives like the European Human Brain Project or New Zealand’s Baby X show serious attempts at emulating human brain—and consciousness—on a digital drive. In fact, startups like Humai or Nectome are trying to raise funds for the realization of a similar scenario. The experiments with telomerase expression are under way, e.g. at the Stanford University, nanotechnology is being developed by Google, synthetic biology at e.g. Harvard and Oxford. Mostly, though, these are interdisciplinary international teams, funded either privately or from supra-national programs.

As can be seen, the first predicate for the postmortal condition would be the naturalist¹¹ perception of man that defines life and death, and consequently immortality, on the physical level. For those branches of immortalism

11. In its strong versions, the transhumanist view could be seen as physicalist or materialist, depending on the adopted framework. Here, the term “naturalism” is accepted as perhaps the broadest and most frequently used in connection with transhumanism. Of course, it can be argued that transhumanists engage in materialism or physicalism, or—conversely—in contemporary gnosis.

that seek to preserve an individual body, it is not necessary to engage in mind-body dualism. However, those that seek mind require the belief in the existence of a soul-mind quite independent from the body. Fundamental to them are the theories of self, well summarized in *The Transhumanist Reader*:

1. The ego theory—a person’s nature is her soul or nonphysical mind, and this mind or soul can survive the death of the body.
2. The psychological continuity theory—you are essentially your memories and ability to reflect on yourself (Locke) and, more generally, your overall psychological configuration, what Kurzweil referred to as your “pattern.”
3. Materialism—you are essentially the material that you are made out of—what Kurzweil referred to as “the ordered and chaotic collection of molecules that make up my body and brain.”
4. The no self view—there is no metaphysical category of person. The “I” is a grammatical fiction (Nietzsche).¹²

Depending on the accepted view, the prolongation of life would take a different form. Broadly, the psychological continuity is sought in the current emulation attempts, making it possible to discard the thought of the body as anything other than a “substrate:” a biological or non-biological host for the independent mind.

The technologies outlined above are those that specifically target ageing but simultaneously they are to remove the physical suffering connected with illnesses and bodily decay or other types of damage. The psychical pain is to be alleviated thanks to pharmacology or neurological implants—the solutions proposed by the proponents of emotional and moral enhancement, the latter having additional benefit of making people inclined to cooperate rather than wage wars on others.¹³ The combination of all types of enhancement can be seen as akin to Pearce’s “paradise engineering”—the attainment of processual pleasure of kaleidoscopic variety, creating an opportunity for infinite fulfillment and life satisfaction.¹⁴ This discloses another feature of the postmortal society: the predilection towards

12. James Hughes, “Transhumanism and Personal Identity,” in *The Transhumanist Reader*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 230.

13. Hauskeller, *Mythologies of Transhumanism*.

14. David Pearce, “The Hedonistic Imperative,” 2004, <https://www.hedweb.com/hedab.htm>.

neo-hedonism, and being caught in the dialectic between pain and pleasure. Pearce's neo-hedonism, described by Max More as utopian,¹⁵ is built upon the avoidance of pain, and—by extension—death, which is perceived as ultimate harm. The reductionist perception of human emotional and moral spheres leads to the belief that these can be controlled biomedically and biotechnologically, or—in extreme cases—that there is no self at all, only physical processes that can be classified as either bringing pleasure or pain. While the strong version is not necessary to be embraced for all varieties of immortalism, some form of neo-hedonistic thought lies at the roots of the longevity project; this might relay to the acceptance of other neo-hedonist attitudes in daily life, such as the erasure of spaces for anything associated with pain (e.g. ugliness, old age, deformity, etc.).

Finally, the postmortal condition inscribes itself in the theories that concentrate on human survival, thus, we may say, anthropocentric ones (as opposed to e.g. biocentric or theocentric). Within this anthropocentric paradigm, novel soteriological and eschatological ideas are developed, impacting and engaging existent ones, which mostly belong to the major world religions. Immortality is created and granted by humans, thus, not by any higher power. Death does not hold a major value, as a landmark in human development and the passage to another quality of being. Consequently, it is not perceived as an end that gives meaning to human life: at best, it could become a repeatable experience or a ritual, which might be lived through in search of e.g. an emotional thrill. Life is not finite, but processual, subject to never-ending mutability. However, if any theory of mind-soul is accepted, this subjective part would constitute an agent providing the order and form for the mutations. Given the liquidity of everyday experience, some kind of spirituality would have to be developed to ensure the existence of an anchor for the mind-soul, providing it with a set of values. However, the issue of spirituality in postmortalism, which would seem to introduce humanity into a post-apocalyptic New Jerusalem or Omega Point, is enigmatic to say the least: it either removes the possibility of meeting God (by staying in the body) or attempts to “elevate” humanity to such a meeting (i.e. to equalize the status of man and God). This, obviously, is imprecise and difficult to imagine.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the postmortal condition depends on specific ontic and axiological assumptions, challenging the commonly accepted syllogism that “all men are mortal” therefore “all men have

15. Max More, “The Philosophy of Transhumanism,” in *The Transhumanist Reader*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 14.

to die.” It is mostly theorized and researched around the belief that human beings are made of a physical body and a set of mental patterns emanating from it that can be brought down to electrical impulses and recorded and restored indefinitely, provided that proper technology is developed. It seeks deliverance from death within anthropocentric paradigm, which implies that other existent paradigms would be incompatible with the idealized postmortal state. As we shall see in the following parts, and importantly to the aims of the present discussion, those basic predicates may lead to serious conflicts either on the social plane or in the individual conscience.

3. ALTERED CARBON: DEATH, TRANSHUMANISM AND RELIGION

Apparently, the drive to create the postmortal society is defining death as not valuable or of negative value, thus an evil or harm that need to be erased. It seems to be an extension of the neohedonistic cult of health and youth, and naturalistic hinging the good of human beings solely on their bodily condition. Inasmuch as today the “right to life” is foregrounded by the opponents of euthanasia, in the postmortal society the “right to die” would perhaps acquire a perversely new desirability. Ironically, the utopia of voluntary death brings to the forefront the problem of the “duty to live.” Quite frequently, postmortalist fictions foreground the reasons to live—or: to die—engaging in dialogue with the anthropologies of euthanasia and suicide, i.e. the notions of human in relation to death, and the value of death for humans. The debate about the permissibility of death is waged from the antiquity, often presenting characters like Tithonus, Sisyphus, the Wandering Jew or Count Dracula to portray the fate of immortals longing for death because of reaching deep old age, disease and/or unbearable suffering in the face of absurd existence, the loss of the loved ones and isolation. It is connected with individual characters and the social stigma. However, contemporarily the visions of the postmortal society show a mirror reflection of the past prejudice. Below I discuss two perspectives in which those who want to die, not those who live forever, are condemned and ostracized.

The recently serialized novel of Richard Morgan, *Altered Carbon* (2002; 2018), can be used as a thought experiment. It provides an interesting example of the clash between two understandings of death. Let us assume with Morgan, for the sake of the discussion, that in future time T humanity achieves superhuman level by devising a way to record consciousness on digital drives that can be transferred between different bodies. Morgan describes a postmortal society in which human life is brought down to a series of psycho-cerebral processes and encoded on a switchable drive—a “stack.”

This data can be copied multiple times and embodied in different “sleeves” (as bodies are called), regardless of the original skin color, biological sex or biological age. What matters are the memories and the internal integrity that is quite separate from the human body. Importantly, though, most of the time it does not represent the “brain in the vat” phenomenon: the “souls” are stored on the stacks but, much like DNA, are not activated unless they are “sleeved.” As long as a particular human being is needed, or as long as they have resources to ensure new bodies, they can keep on living active life. With the existence of cheap back-up copies, lives can be restored indefinitely, provided that one can afford a new body. The only way to really die is to have one’s cortical stack destroyed.

The main premise of the novel, quite clearly, reposes on the mind transfer idea of Raymond Kurzweil and the post-Lockean conception of a person as a set of retrievable memories and impressions (the abovementioned psychological continuity theory). It also follows the conviction that a person is alive only as long as the brain is functioning, and the mind-soul is seen as enclosed in the brain cortex and brain stem. The mind-soul, worth noting, is perceived in a fully naturalistic paradigm, equal to the sum of electrical impulses.

In Morgan’s postmortal society, the relation between the body and mind-soul is like between clothes or objects (“sleeves”¹⁶) and human beings. Both bodies and mind-souls are marketable goods and—even if owned privately, in certain cases can be appropriated by the government or by the police e.g. to testify in court. People who did not die real death can be revived to bear witness to crimes or to answer questions from their progeny. Even if people commit suicide, they are brought to life again by medical services, unless they claim reasons not to be re-embodied (“resleeved”). These embodiments come with assorted issues that are experienced by everyone. In his essay on *Altered Carbon*, resleeving and subjectivity, Hamdan¹⁷ recounts multiple side effects and psychological issues the characters experience. If downloaded to someone else’s body, they have to cope with muscle memory and habits of the previous owner. If, on the other hand, they choose a synthetic one, they seem to be cut off from “normal” sensory experiences. What is

16. The word “sleeve” may refer to a piece of clothing, to a cover for document files or digital recordings, or a protective tube for a part of a machine. It underscores the meaninglessness of the body and its infinite exchangeability at least in concept: the practice in the novel shows differences coming with being “sleeved” in separate bodies, inherited from others or made synthetically.

17. Shahizah Ismail Hamdan, “Human Subjectivity and Technology in Richard Morgan’s *Altered Carbon*,” *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 17 (2011): 121–32.

more, the consciousness that one’s own original body may serve as a host for a mind of another, is perceived as violation. The only way to avoid these issues seems cloning oneself in the event of death.

The group that opposes resleeving, especially for the purposes of police investigation or other instrumental and utilitarian means, are Catholics. “They don’t believe you can digitize a human being without losing the soul,”¹⁸ and because of that they pose a major challenge and an obstacle to the functioning of the postmortal society. They use the right to die and self-ownership, perversely called by other characters “the reasons of conscience,” not to perpetuate their existence. The only technology of immortality they accept is cryonics which still does not violate their belief that “only God can resurrect.”¹⁹ Also, they accept that all consciousness is “stored” somewhere. What they actually oppose is called D.H.F. (dead human freight)—the transportation of digitized consciousness into another body. In the novel, Catholics protest against the introduction of Resolution 653, which would override their “reasons of conscience:”

“What’s Resolution 653?”

“It’s a test case going through the U.N. court,” Ortega said shortly. “Bay City public prosecutor’s office wants to subpoena a Catholic who’s in storage. Pivotal witness. The Vatican say she’s already dead and in the hands of God. They’re calling it blasphemy.”²⁰

Morgan’s “Catholics” are not given much voice in his novels—they are observed as a *curiosum*. As Ortega—a character who utters the above words—continues:

I hate these goddamn freaks. They’ve been grinding us down for the best part of two and a half thousand years. They’ve been responsible for more misery than any other organization in history. You know they won’t even let their adherents practice birth control, for Christ’s sake, and they’ve stood against every significant medical advance of the last five centuries. Practically the only thing you can say in their favor is that this D.H.F. thing has stopped them from spreading with the rest of humanity.²¹

18. Richard K. Morgan, *Altered Carbon* (London: Gollancz, 2002), 23.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 24.

21. *Ibid.*, 25.

While this negative portrayal is culturally-influenced by the milieu that produced the novel (e.g. the negative portrayal of religious groups in Anglophone Gothic, the neo-Catholic and creationist image in contemporary American society), it is worth asking a question if in the event of achieving technological postmortality Catholics would have rational reasons to oppose immortality technologies or would Ortega's words hold true. Therefore, it is in a sense a question about the validity of the transhumanist identification of religion as a major enemy of technological progress (and their ideology), and about the boundary between the actual philosophical grounds for "obstructing justice" in the name of "blind faith."²² In the next parts, I will attempt to supplement the Catholic views, which in the novel are presented only from the outside and very critically, with argumentation, beginning with the comparison of the naturalistic—transhumanist and religious—Catholic views on death.

3.1. *Naturalistic/Transhumanist Understanding of Death*

In an oft-repeated transhumanist fable, death is a "dragon-tyrant"²³. The cognitive metaphors the H+ movement uses to express their stance revolve around the central image of an enemy, and they function as a call to action. Rarely, though, consideration is given to what death is to human beings. From some of the accounts of personal experiences of immortalists²⁴ emerges the experience of incomprehensibility, injustice and suffering, not followed by any meaningful explanation. Usually, though, the reflection is spun from the data obtained from observation, rather than personal grappling with incurable illness in one's own body. Therefore, it seems safe to say that the transhumanist perspective on death is mediated via a certain philosophy and anthropology that provide grounds for it. In the following paragraphs the assumption is made that transhumanists partake in the naturalistic mindset, and such approach to death will be presented.

In general, it is to be understood from naturalist thought that one cannot survive the cessation of one's bodily processes, and if decay—especially on the DNA level—sets in, the recovery of a person is impossible. In a variety of naturalistic stances, thinkers tend to relate to the thermodynamic conception of death, and treat it solely as a problem to be solved on the physical level. There is no human fulfillment that can be achieved through

22. After a dystopian novel by Ben Elton (2007), harshly critical of anti-scientific approach in religion.

23. Nick Bostrom, "The Fable of the Dragon-Tyrant," 2005, <https://nickbostrom.com/fable/dragon.html>.

24. See e.g. Immortality Institute, *The Scientific Conquest of Death*.

dying—rather, all the good comes from life: either fully mental or fully embodied. The mental life is perceived in terms of neuro-cerebral activity and the resultant memories, impressions and ideas, whose coherence would correspond to bodily integrity, i.e. the greater the coherence, the more “alive” a person is. The loss of integrity at any level would threaten dignity and life of a person with unacceptable degradation. Death for naturalists means the cessation of existence, although it is variously imagined, depending on the variety of naturalism that is supported. Some, for instance, would claim that “there is no ultimate personal survival of the body’s demise,” and others that people continue to exist in some relational way, e.g. as memories in others’ minds.²⁵ If there is an after-life, it has to be explicable without bringing in supernatural explanations.

Since physical life is perceived as a necessary condition for the fulfillment of one’s moral duties, the perspective assumed by Bostrom—that the choice of death equals mental aberration—arises as an inevitable consequence. Within transhumanist thought it is specified that some liberty should be guaranteed for those who in fact want to terminate their existence (voluntary death); however, all factors that lead to involuntary death should be eliminated, so as to leave a human being with the possibility to exercise unfettered free will. As follows from the above view on death, it can be inferred that death is threat not so much to biological processes but to the cherished autonomy, prized by the transhumanist movement. Yielding to biological decay, environmental factors or living on solely as a construct in somebody else’s mind compromises the point of authentic life and individual existence, the right to privacy and personal integrity.

This integrity, it seems, is mostly seen as part of the problem of consciousness. Philosophers like Peter Singer tend to see it as fundamental for the inclusion into the notion of a person i.e. a human being whose life should be protected by law. This is quite frequently broadened to include not only the ability to act voluntarily, but also the ability to experience pain, and generalized “sentience.” The lack of observable signs of sentience would result in the loss of personhood, signaled by the impossibility to make intentional choices.²⁶

How measurable would consciousness be within the naturalistic paradigm? It would have to be explained relating to a site in the body or a physical process in which or through which it may occur. Today, the criterion

25. Charles A. Hobbs, “Naturalism, Death, and Functional Immortality,” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 6, no. 1 (2009): 42, doi:10.1163/18758185-90000104.

26. Grzegorz Hołub, *Problem osoby we współczesnych debatach bioetycznych* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2010), 63–4, 72–3.

of brain death is usually accepted, which may be divided into higher brain death and lower brain death.²⁷ Higher brain death means the cessation of consciousness, thus effectively erasing the person, and the lower brain death would mean the annihilation of the body. This dualism allows for making a distinction between personal and physical death²⁸ within the naturalistic paradigm, and allows for unlimited body modification and the exchange of bodies without threat to personhood and personal identity. The obliteration of the body would not equal the loss of consciousness: it would be revived and incarnated infinitely.

This is the case in *Altered Carbon*. The main catchphrase of the post-mortal era is “don’t worry, they’ll store it”: mind and body are separated, and treated as commodities. Whereas almost everybody has the right to storage (the preservation of the mind), preserving one’s DNA e.g. in a clone, and resleeving is considerably more pricey. This leads Kawahara, the main villain in the story, to sneer:

“The value of it. The *value* of a human life.” Kawahara shook her head like a teacher with an exasperating student. “You are still young and stupid. Human life has no value. Haven’t you learned that yet, Takeshi, with all you’ve seen? It has no value, intrinsic to itself. Machines cost money to build. Raw materials cost money to extract. But people?” She made a tiny spitting sound. “You can always get some more people. They reproduce like cancer cells, whether you want them or not. They are *abundant*, Takeshi.

Why should they be valuable? Do you know that it costs us *less* to recruit and use up a real snuff whore than it does to set up and run the virtual equivalent format. Real human flesh is *cheaper* than a machine. It’s the axiomatic truth of our times.”²⁹

First of all, this makes evident that the immortalist technology reduces the body to its constituent parts that can be recreated. Within naturalistic approach a person can be equalized with the body: as evident, in the *Altered Carbon* world people are instrumentalized, even if only as their bodies. The bodies of those that went into storage can be bought and inhabited by other “owners,” although it comes with unpleasant sensations retained

27. *Ibid.*, 109.

28. E.g. William E. May, “Is There a ‘Right’ to Die?,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (1993), doi:10.1080/20508549.1993.11878226.

29. Morgan, *Altered Carbon*, 429.

in the flesh of the originals; especially when it comes to cross-sleeving i.e. uploading a mind to a differently gendered body. In a rather explicit manner, Morgan shows the abuse of the human body by the criminal underworld, the sex business and the military being the main beneficiaries. The main characters do not notice any direct benefits from numerous revivals. As it is drily stated: “What D.H.F. storage *has* done is make it possible to torture a human being to death, and then start again.”³⁰

Secondly, Meths—the super-longaevi—are not considered human by the society, who believe them similar to A.I. Even between non-religious people they are seen as crossing the border of the “natural.” In Morgan’s world, to be resleeved one usually has to have one body destroyed or aged so that it cannot merit further use. It is stated that “it takes a certain kind of people”³¹ to be able to go through bodily death more than twice. This kind of people, in the process of accumulating years, become dehumanized by the sheer span of time they lived through, and by their wealth. To paraphrase Lord Acton, ultimate immortality corrupts ultimately. People like Laurens Bancroft, one of Meths, no longer care about the lives of those that have lived only thirty or forty years: for super-immortals, these are dispensable. Again, the problem of instrumentalization appears, introduced as a warning against super-longevity, and the limitations of the naturalistic approach come to the forefront. If it is supposed to repose on the notion of nature, it would have to defend its stance beginning with the definition of nature—even if taken only as signifying the physical world, it still implies boundaries not easily overcome by humans.

Thirdly, the mind, separated from the body, is acknowledged to be incomplete. “A digitised mind is only a snapshot. You don’t capture individual thoughts any more than a satellite image captures an individual life.”³² This is consistent with the belief in the extropian nature of knowledge: the conviction that there is always more to learn about the processes of the human body, and that the current technology still leaves room for the scientific explanation of many more processes. This understanding of the limitations of naturalism with its simultaneous application in scientific ethics is rather dangerous considering that the radical changes introduced into human beings are made with full knowledge about the incompleteness of data necessary to further such changes. It is admitted that individuality cannot be grasped—only certain patterns within time, and even these “from

30. Ibid., 169.

31. Ibid., 75.

32. Ibid., 169.

a satellite view.” In the vision offered by the novel, however, these patterns are enough to restore human identity.

Finishing this overview, it is worth referring to Józef Życiński, who in his book *Odyseusz czy playboy?*³³ suggests—contrarily to the majority of sources—that in the name “transhumanism” one should not look for transcendence, which is reserved for spirituality. According to him, human in transhumanism is a “transitional man:” a dispersed and never finished project. Infinity, reserved for God, cannot be relayed to an extropian *homo deus*: for the lack of finitude, we could perhaps talk about “un-finity” and processuality. It brings one, then, to the point made by the Christians in *Altered Carbon*: that only God wields the power over life and death.

3.2. *The Religious/Catholic Understanding of Death*

As can be seen, even within the fictive universe the concept of death understood within the naturalistic perspective meets with considerable difficulties, which thinkers such as George E. Moore would attribute to a “naturalistic fallacy,” i.e. the belief that everything can be explained away with empirical methods of description.³⁴ As it turns out, death can be conceived of only partially as a measurable reality, while a part of it can only be accessed intuitively.³⁵ The acknowledgement of non-material aspect of a human person makes it necessary to give consideration to what death means to this part of a person, which is best answered by non-naturalistic approaches. As asserted by John J. McDermott,

The history of culture has presented many varieties of immortality. Perhaps the most ingenious, although the least plausible, is that of traditional Roman Catholicism, wherein each of us, *bodily*, is resurrected glorious and immortal or damned and immortal. The attraction here is that our eternal life will be affectively continuous with our mortal life. Other versions of the doctrine of immortality involve claims of reincarnation, metempsychosis, immersion, or absorption, each attempting to perpetuate the me which is me, in one form or another.³⁶

33. Józef Życiński, *Odyseusz czy playboy? Kulturowa odyseja człowieka* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), 89.

34. Thomas Hurka, “Moore’s Moral Philosophy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2015), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/moore-moral/>; Hobbs, “Naturalism, Death, and Functional Immortality,” 42.

35. Hołub, *Problem osoby*, 175–6.

36. John J. McDermott, *Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 162; cited in: Hobbs, “Naturalism, Death, and Functional Immortality,” 59.

For the purposes of this article, the “most ingenious” example of a non-naturalistic stance, Catholic perspective will be examined. The general assumption underlying this perspective is that it is theocentric, thus, fundamentally different from the above-presented approach. Therefore, while in naturalism everything had to be explicable in reference to physical processes, here everything, including the theory of death, will have to be relative to God. Catholicism offers an alternative set of values and endows death with meaning that it cannot achieve in naturalism. Since pleasure is not a substantial value, and the notions of heaven and hell cannot be simply seen as the extensions of pleasure and pain, the secularization of these ideals in naturalism brings about a dystopian result. Morgan describes it as follows:

The human race has dreamed of heaven and hell for millennia. Pleasure or pain unending, undiminished and uncurtailed by the strictures of life or death. Thanks to virtual formatting, these fantasies can now exist. All that is needed is an industrial-capacity power generator. We have indeed made hell—and heaven—on earth.³⁷

It is also acknowledged that a good deal of other phenomena cannot be explained in naturalistic terms, including not only the intangible subjectivity but also the body. On the very basic level, it is important to realize that in Christian perspective body it is necessarily connected with soul, whether we take a more ancient, biblical view of St. Paul, medieval thought of Thomas Aquinas, or the more recent “ontological personalism” of Karol Wojtyła.³⁸ St. Paul would build his anthropology on the belief that a human being is made up of *soma* (human body³⁹), *psyche* (intangible natural part) and *pneuma* (spiritual supernatural part), which cannot exist one without another. While remaining separate concepts and faculties, they form one inseparable whole. Human is treated as immortal not only in his/her intangible or spiritual aspect. The separation of this whole is impossible—it would mean human would not exist.⁴⁰ In this view, therefore, at the

37. Morgan, *Altered Carbon*, 328.

38. Grzegorz Hołub, “Human Enhancement: the Person and the Posthuman Personhood,” *Ethics and Medicine* 32, no. 3 (2016): 171–83; Andrzej Muszala, “Śmierć człowieka w perspektywie teologicznej,” in *Człowiek na granicy istnienia. Dyskusje o śmierci mózgowej i innych aspektach umierania*, eds. Grzegorz Hołub and Piotr Duchliński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Ignatianum, 2018).

39. In contrast to *sarks* (body). Muszala, “Śmierć człowieka w perspektywie teologicznej,” 250–1.

40. *Ibid.*, 243–5; Hołub, *Problem osoby*, 232–4.

moment of death the *soma*, *psyche* and *pneuma* are not separated but are taken wholly into the eternal life.⁴¹ According to the view on resurrection-in-death, the collapse of the material categories at the moment of death, e.g. measurable time and space, enables thinking about death as in fact simultaneous with “new birth.”⁴²

How, then, is death understood in Catholicism? The Catechism provides the following definition:

Death is the end of earthly life. Our lives are measured by time, in the course of which we change, grow old and, as with all living beings on earth, death seems like the normal end of life. That aspect of death lends urgency to our lives: remembering our mortality helps us realize that we have only a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment.

The Church’s Magisterium, as authentic interpreter of the affirmations of Scripture and Tradition, teaches that death entered the world on account of man’s sin. Even though man’s nature is mortal God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and entered the world as a consequence of sin. “Bodily death, from which man would have been immune had he not sinned” is thus “the last enemy” of man left to be conquered.⁴³

Interestingly, the last sentence rings with similar tones as transhumanist rhetoric. However, as much as transhumanism seeks to avoid or domesticate death, Christians seem to genuinely conquer the bodily death in the sense of restoring the prelapsarian condition of man.

Largely, thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, death is understood to have a positive meaning.⁴⁴ What is more, death may be understood as a certain “good,” allowing people to reach a different level of personhood or spiritual development. We often speak about becoming a different person, or about maturing through difficult experiences, if the crisis is worked

41. It needs to be underlined that the cited authors present a specific version of personalism, which experiences internal tensions while trying to combine theological and ethical reflection. More specifically, it entails the long-standing problem of the relation of grace and nature. Grace in Christian anthropology is perceived as fundamentally distinct from nature, given to nature, but not identical with it. The identification of these two would amount to an attempt at the philosophical naturalization of grace, which for Catholics is not acceptable.

42. Muszala, “Śmierć człowieka w perspektywie teologicznej,” 245–64.

43. “Dying in Christ Jesus,” *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, accessed December 12, 2019, vatican.va.

44. *Ibid.*, 1010.

through. If it is avoided, denied or rejected, an individual is not able to, in fact, transcend the current condition. It is strictly underlined that death is integrated into the linear conception of human life, it happens only once and that there is no reincarnation. In *Altered Carbon*, there is a distinction between “real death” and storage: real death involves the destruction of the cortical stack and the impossibility of recovery of a human in another body. Catholics reject such a view: for them, all deaths are real, and involve irreversible consequences. It is not meant to signify, though, that humans pass into “eternal oblivion”—rather, they experience theosis, and recovering a body or a set of memories cannot change that. A problem arises in relation to cryogenics, which in *Altered Carbon* is accepted by Catholics. “So cryogenic suspension is okay, but digitised human freight isn’t. Interesting.”⁴⁵ In the light of the above-sketches views on the connection between the body and soul-mind, it is to be understood that here, in contrast to the D.H.F. technology, the human is still treated integrally, and the abuse of the constituent parts is avoided.

Andrzej Muszala⁴⁶ writes about numerous ways in which death can be seen as desirable. First of all, death may be understood as a completion of life. The essence of this understanding is the recognition of the paradigmatic death of Christ who offered His life to His Father and for the salvation of others. It was, then, necessarily relational and founded upon love as underlying motive and energizing force. A similar intuition is expressed by a Christian existentialist, Gabriel Marcel. In *Pour une sagesse tragique et son au-delà* (1968) he points out how death may be conceived as a mystery, rather than a problem. Whereas the problem can expect a measurable and verifiable solution, mystery is to be embraced or lived through rather than negated or obliterated. Like above, neither life nor death cannot be treated as a solitary endeavor of a solipsistic being or an end to an individual journey. They are to be experienced in intersubjective relations with others.⁴⁷

Secondly, death can be seen as a “new birth.” There is much to be made out of this proposition. It may be perceived as related to the fact that a human being is transported to eternity and begins spiritual life on a new level. With the view to the holistic treatment of *soma*, *psyche* and *pneuma*, it needs to be understood that this “new birth” concerns all the three spheres. This led to the formulation of the notion of resurrection-in-death, i.e. such

45. Morgan, *Altered Carbon*, 24.

46. Muszala, “Śmierć człowieka w perspektywie teologicznej,” 254–64.

47. William Soderberg, “Two Views of Death: Naturalist and Existentialist,” <https://bill-soderberg.com/bills-essays/two-views-of-death-2/>.

a beginning of a new life that would transcend the physical limitations and elevate the whole human being to life in God, without “waiting” for the Last Judgment. It is analogical to the belief that human being is one whole from the moment of conception: he or she will be born to the new life in the same manner—in the wholeness of existence.

Thirdly, human beings reach the fullness of their existence and gain the mastery over their weaknesses only passing through death. The passage from the life marred by the Original Sin to eternity of prelapsarian integration and harmony makes it possible to avoid “un-finitude,” characterized by the constant unrest and the feeling of incompleteness. It is also the crowning of a journey composed of the steps taken of one’s own volition towards the actual self-realization in relation to others.

Lastly, death is the ultimate expression of man’s freedom. It follows from the exercise of free will during lifetime, so it results from autonomy, but it has also a liberating function. It is usually seen as freeing man from some kind of bondage—in Christianity understood as dysfunctional relations and disordered desires. Thanks to it, a human being is able to open oneself to the fullness of relations with other beings. Ultimately, it is the liberation from egoism and is the ultimate gift of oneself to God and the world.

As can be seen, death itself is for Catholics much more complex than simply disintegration of the body. The gains from the perpetuation of bodily existence are insignificant, and—what is more—the pursuit of physical immortality is by some theologians seen as a sin. In “Diagnosing Death in the Transhumanism and Christian Traditions” (2014) Todd T. W. Daly does not hesitate to say: “I suggest that the aspiration to overcome death through technology is sinful if sin is understood as striving to become *sicut deus*, ‘like God.’”⁴⁸ He goes on to explain, following Dietrich Boenhoffer, that the proper state for a human being is to accept one’s creatureliness and the giftedness of life whose constant source is God. Daly calls transhumanism’s quest to end death “muddled and ontically shallow”⁴⁹—addressing only one facet of existence, and, to that, not the most important one. The evil of rejecting God as a source of life makes it impossible to receive life: it can only be sustained. Life, in a sense, becomes an obligation. Man, having taken the place of God as one’s own supplier of life, lives in constant struggle against death and under the burden of responsibility for one’s

48. Todd T. W. Daly, “Diagnosing Death in the Transhumanism and Christian Traditions,” in *Religion and Transhumanism: the Unknown Future of Human Enhancement*, ed. Calvin Mercer and Tracy J. Trother (Westport: Praeger, 2014), 83.

49. *Ibid.*, 86.

own survival and the survival of other beings in harmony and fullness of existence. This is why Daly concludes that the transhumanist immortality plan is doomed to failure.

The above discussion shows that Catholics in the postmortal world described by Morgan have a markedly different view on death than the rest of the society. It follows from their theocentric anthropology, the holistic view of a human, the respect for the body and the non-naturalistic concept of life. It explains why they claim that the human being is indivisible and that only God can resurrect. It does not make clear, however, if they should be able to embrace the right to die and develop a peculiar “death culture:” today, both concepts are very far from the Catholic thought. In the next part I look for some clues in the contemporary bioethical debate around the end-of-life issues.

4. REASONS TO DIE IN THE POSTMORTAL WORLD—INSIGHTS FROM THE EUTHANASIA DEBATE

Some insights into the problem of the right to die come from today’s euthanasia debate, which provides a set of objective reasons and subjective motivations that are brought up to justify and define “good death.” These can be used—after adjustment—for the calibration of the concept of death in the postmortal society. On the surface, this flip of the mortality coin seems counterintuitive: why would anyone seek death if they can live a happy, fulfilling life, not threatened by bodily decay and sudden cessation of existence? In the absence of suffering and assuming the prolonged health-span (good quality of life), the only rationale for choosing death, from the naturalistic point of view, would be the freedom of choice of an individual⁵⁰. Normally, the meaning of life is derived from personal beliefs, supplied by philosophies and religions. Therefore, a major question of postmortal era would be which of them would survive to provide guidelines concerning the choice between life and death. The right to die is usually supported by the utilitarian and neohedonist frameworks—these, however, could be problematized with the specific features of postmortal society. As was shown in the above paragraphs, their pursuit of effectiveness and pleasure may come into conflict with individual freedom and autonomous agency. Religions such as Christianity currently oppose euthanasia and other forms

50. Amadeusz Pala, “Eutanazja, uporczywa terapia i opieka paliatywna. Próba moralnej oceny w świetle antropologii naturalistycznej i personalistycznej,” in *Człowiek na granicy istnienia. Dyskusje o śmierci mózgowej i innych aspektach umierania*, ed. Grzegorz Hołub and Piotr Duchliński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Ignatianum, 2018), 267–94.

of “death culture,” demonstrating a pro-life attitude. However, the role of religion could perhaps change from advocating life to advocating death as the essence of being human. Already the participatory suffering and mortality are perceived as typical and sometimes beneficial for the human condition, allowing for spiritual transcendence and the communion with the sacred. Renouncing death and instituting man-made immortality would challenge the basic tenets of major religions, in which death is a major step for humans to take in their spiritual development.⁵¹

The variety of biotechnologies developed with the mind to the prolongation of healthspan and the attainment of functional immortality challenge the contemporary notions of life and death, especially in medical context. The battle against ageing and the neohedonistic pursuit of pleasure provide the mould for the shapes of understanding of what could be considered a good death, and if death is even acceptable in the postmortal society. The apparent paradox of posthumanist and transhumanist theories, hailing life as a supreme value while at the same time staunchly defending the right to die, calls for deeper reflection on the meanings attached to these two states. Striving to abolish death of natural causes, humans are left only with self-inflicted death, which contemporarily is conceptualized as either suicide or euthanasia, the latter being a more broadly accepted practice. Clearly, though, the modern understanding of euthanasia as relieving unbearable suffering or “curing” an illness by killing the patient cannot hold in the postmortal future. To analyze this question further, I first look at the distinction between euthanasia and suicide. Secondly, I examine the motivations that push people to seek death by euthanasia today, and then make necessary adjustments to formulate a prediction which of these motivations would be valid in a postmortal society. Finally, I juxtapose the right to die with the duty to live and show the difference in their understanding in the postmortal society.

4.1. Suicide vs. Euthanasia

Notoriously, euthanasia is difficult to define, and it is variously conceptualized depending on philosophical and religious systems, and national laws. In most cases, it is perceived as a form of homicide occasioned by and justified by intractable suffering, and it is legalized in few countries. This

51. The immortality technologies are to a degree inspired by unorthodox interpretations of Buddhism and Christianity, to mention Cyber Buddha project and Fedorov’s “active Christianity.” The latter, in fact, saw developing immortality technologies as a duty of a religious person. For deeper discussion of the religious context of the immortality debate see Calvin Mercer and Tracy J. Trother, eds., *Religion and Transhumanism: the Unknown Future of Human Enhancement* (Westport: Praeger, 2014).

understanding of euthanasia, deriving from the Baconian one,⁵² is common, however, not universal. In some cases, e.g. in Belgium, the notion of euthanasia is extended to signify the intentional doctor-administered termination of the patient’s life at the patient’s explicit request,⁵³ irrespective of the presence of suffering. It can be divided into voluntary and non-voluntary, the second one administered by third parties in the absence of communication with the patient. In the countries which disallow the active and/or passive euthanasia it is sometimes possible to submit to the assisted suicide procedure. This provoked the rise of the trend of “suicide tourism,” also known as “going to Switzerland,” to obtain help in ending one’s life.⁵⁴ The publicized example of such tourism has recently been the death of David Goodall (2018), a proponent of the “right to die” movement. Moreover, some organizations, like Scottish EXIT, offer self-deliverance workshops which present the participants with DIY kits and instruction for the effective suicide.⁵⁵

Semantically, there is a considerable overlap between suicide and euthanasia. Both concern self-inflicted death, motivated by various reasons, usually unbearable physical or mental pain. Euthanasia can be voluntary or involuntary, in the second case when somebody’s life is considered to be not worth living or negligible. This second case cannot be considered in relation to Morgan’s world, where all involuntary deaths, inflicted by another party, are murder. In fact, the main plot of the novel revolves around the death of a Meth, which is classified as a suicide, but the revived victim claims he was murdered. Whereas from the point of view of naturalism suicide may be considered a case of mental instability to be cured by drugs which address neuro-chemical balance in the brain, from the point of view of Catholicism it is impermissible. It rejects the giftedness of life, offends the respect of one’s own life and the lives of others. As The Catechism states: “We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls.”⁵⁶

52. Francis Bacon first used the term “euthanasia” (*New Atlantis*, 1605) to signify the goodness of death as reposing in the alleviation of suffering.

53. “The Belgian Act on Euthanasia of May 28th 2002,” *Ethical Perspectives* 9, no. 2–3 (2002), doi:10.2143/EP.9.2.503856.

54. Naomi Richards, “Assisted Suicide as a Remedy for Suffering? The End of Life Preferences of British ‘Suicide Tourists,’” *Medical Anthropology* 36, no. 4, doi:10.1080/01459740.2016.1255610.

55. *Ibid.*

56. “Respect for Human Life,” *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993), http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P7Z.HTM. 2280–3.

Given the responsibility to preserve one's life, it is striking that Morgan's Catholics do not want to prolong their existence via technology. According to teachings, they should embrace the means of caring for one's life, and the refusal to be resleeved comes considerably close to suicide. At least in naturalistic understanding, a Catholic that chooses permanent storage violates the precepts of their own religion. Storage is not life—it makes technological reincarnation possible, but the raw data of mental processes cannot be considered living unless they are embodied, even if only in a synthetic body. More importantly, though, it is a conscious decision and the intention “to not be resuscitated” that is questionable. The medical system is obligated to bring back the victims of suicide, and it takes some effort to ensure before the law that one will not be brought back. Also, considering that after the storage the bodies of Catholics are sold whole or as transplant parts, the custody they have over their physicality should obligate them to make sure they will be respected and not abused. In fact, by refusing to be embodied, Catholics leave their bodies to be desecrated e.g. by becoming reusable sleeves. This certainly would constitute a “bad” death.

The fine distinction here is between taking one's life and “discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome.”⁵⁷ The immortality technologies can be viewed as such medical procedures that try to deny the inevitability of death and God's mastery over human life. What is more, even in the case of suicide there are some circumstances that can be seen as extenuating, although they do not make it permissible. Usually, though, it is the acceptance of death, rather than the active choice of “voluntary death,” as transhumanists would have it, that lies at the bottom of the Catholic approach to “the right to die.”

Etymologically, the difference between suicide and euthanasia is considerable. Whereas suicide means the “killing of oneself,” euthanasia relates to “good death.” Therefore, one can think of possible reasons and motivations that would make death good not only for Catholics, as shown above, but also for naturalists. It is valid to ask the question if death can be considered good in any case. The insights from the questions about suicide show the connection between the conditions of life and the permissibility of the choice of death. However, it is hard to maintain that in the postmortal society, with highly advanced medical practice, the reasons and motivations for ending one's life would be the same.

57. *Ibid.*, 2278.

4.2. *Reasons and Motivations to Die and Their Future*

Today, although the lifespan has been consistently and considerably extending in the developed societies thanks to the advances in institutionalized healthcare and the individual self-care, as of now, the heathspan does not usually match the lived time. In fact, pain in various forms and of different intensity and duration may appear at any age, turning life into torment. Sometimes the vegetative state or full-body paralysis or another mentally or physically debilitating condition makes life extremely trying. Additionally, the costs of healthcare and palliative care may be steep, and with the growing atomization of the society may prove unaffordable for the lethally ill, senile or demented patient. In such conditions, some people either ask to be euthanated or are offered an assisted suicide where such an option is legally permissible.

Considering that the suicidal death—whether assisted or self-inflicted—is seen as “bad” or criminal if performed for selfish reasons, the motivations⁵⁸ behind it are key to understanding it as euthanasia. The most often listed reasons and motivations are:⁵⁹ (1) for voluntary euthanasia: unbearable physical suffering and/or terminal illness; demonstration of one’s beliefs; low economic status, i.e. being unable to afford healthcare or palliative care; being a “burden” for the careers, the society or the planet (“altruism”); being a “burden” to self; feeling “tired of life;” persistent depressive states, stemming from loneliness and dependency on others; (2) for non-voluntary euthanasia: “mercy killing,” i.e. the willingness to terminate suffering of the

58. When talking about euthanasia, it is frequent to use the term “motivation” or “argument” rather than “reason” for or against such a choice. It is then implicitly assumed that the decision of the agent is instrumental to the definition of euthanatic death, and that it would be difficult to arrive at a normative objective reason justifying the event of such a death. The psychological, subjective mode of decision-making is inherent in the choice of euthanasia from the start. Still, when one peruses the most often listed motivations, they seem an amalgam of semi-objective factors, rational reasoning and emotion-driven arguments.

59. The list compiled from the following sources: Michael Cholbi and Jukka Varelius, eds., *New Directions in the Ethics of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia* (New York: Springer, 2015); Michael Cholbi, ed., *Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. Global Views on Choosing to End* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2017); Neil Gorsuch, *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, eds., *A Companion to Bioethics. Blackwell Companions to Philosophy* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); May, “Is There a ‘Right’ to Die?”; Jennifer Fecio McDougall and Martha Gorman, *Euthanasia: a reference handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2008); More and Vita-More, *The Transhumanist Reader*; Neal Nicol and Harry Wylie, *Between the Dying and the Dead. Dr Jack Kevorkian, the Assisted Suicide Machine and the Battle to Legalise Euthanasia* (London: Vision, 2006); James Rachel, *The End of Life. Euthanasia and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), <http://www.jamesrachels.org/EoL.htm>; Richards, “Assisted Suicide.”

patient; permanent vegetative state of the patient; brain death; economic necessity, i.e. lack of funds for healthcare or palliative care.

The advanced and burgeoning research that is geared towards abolishing ageing is a challenge to the branches of bioethics interested in the end-of-life issues, among them, the notion of “good death.” It is clear that many of today’s arguments for and against euthanasia become obsolete in the face of elimination of non-voluntary death and suffering. The motivations for choosing to die, outlined above, in the postmortal era would be severely limited. If the arguments for the permissibility of taking one’s life stem nowadays mostly from empathy and relatedness to unbearable pain, the motivations connected with the experience of illness and death would have to be crossed out from the list presented above. Naturally, it stands to reason that as biotechnologies evolve, new diseases and threats to life will appear; however, in the present analysis the ideal conditions are assumed. Therefore, “good,” unselfish death in the postmortal society would primarily call for an autonomous decision of a human being about the termination of one’s life, thus placing a demand on non-voluntary euthanatic practices: without prior consent of a person, all deaths would have to be considered criminal.

While it is relatively easy to point out and exclude the egoistic motivations in the cases of non-voluntary euthanasia (e.g. greed, hatred, convenience, etc.), the voluntary one is murkier and more ambiguous. The concepts of “altruism,” “depression,” “burden” and “fatigue” are highly subjective, and thus liable to error in judgment. Here Bostrom’s doubts about the authenticity of such motivations for choosing death over life might seem justified. However, they are frequently underlined by the proponents of the right to die, and by transhumanists, as the expression of individual autonomy. Still, these arguments would ring hollow in the posthuman—and to a degree transhuman—future. One of the most often repeated arguments against the pursuit of infinite lifespan is that life would lose meaning in the absence of death. Philosophers like Harris, More, Bostrom, de Grey or Pearce contest that, pointing out the possibilities of personal development unimaginable for today’s unenhanced humans. Extropianism assumes the constant change and development which does not allow for boredom: the broadening of the cognitive horizons through enhancement and extraterrestrial travel should provide enough stimuli to ward off the mental fatigue, resulting in being tired with the routine of life. This optimistic scenario points also to the fact that in the postmortal society physical death would not mean freeing oneself from the existential Angst but merely leaving one body to perhaps inhabit another.

Thus, it would seem that even if physical death were present, it would be inconsequential.

In *Altered Carbon* Bancroft, a multiple resleever, does not seem to suffer from depression or fatigue, as is often imagined for the longaevi. It is the more interesting that in Morgan’s world, contrarily to the visions imagined by e.g. Pearce, suffering is not abolished, and people usually experience the weariness of old age if they cannot afford younger bodies or high-end medical procedures. As he says,

Mr. Kovacs, I am three hundred and fifty-seven years old. I have lived through a corporate war, the subsequent collapse of my industrial and trading interests, the real deaths of two of my children, at least three major economic crises, and I am still here. I am not the kind of man to take my own life.⁶⁰

It is the will to live, not the experienced suffering, that motivates Bancroft to go on, and—at least superficially—a similar attitude should be displayed by Morgan’s Catholics. The Catechism obligates Catholics today to respect and protect all human life absolutely, and suffering is viewed not as a reason giving permission to die but as explaining the decision to die (while not condoning it). Naturalists, then, can suspect Catholics of going against the teachings of their own religion, not taking into account, again, the distinction between the acceptance and the choice of death. Here, they mistake the respect for life with the duty to live: the latter being enforced by the state’s policies rather than an expression of deontological duty or commandment. In the absence of grave suffering, providing grounds for ending one’s life or discontinuing medical treatment, other factors defining the “goodness” of death have to be considered.

In the face of the possibility of unlimited incarnation and the “duty to live,” stemming from legal regulations and *sicut deus* anthropology, euthanatic practices would acquire new value. Bodily destruction would be meaningless, and it would only be a form of symbolic death, a public statement, similar to what Zombie Boy (Rick Genest, 1985-2018) did with the help of realistic decay tattoos covering his skin. In this way, euthanasia increasingly becomes a ritual and a cultural practice. In the future the “good death” of a body could be then perhaps considered in aesthetic terms, as a powerful or mediocre piece of art.

Although such a world in which death is brought to the level of entertainment and cultural construct seems only the subject of satire, Neil Postman

60. Morgan, *Altered Carbon*, 44.

already in 1985 diagnosed the danger of the neohedonist society, “amusing itself to death.” In his book he drew attention to mechanisms of show business normalizing death and atrocity, and the consequent loss of meaning of the repetitive malleable news, each day presenting the viewers with new cases of murders and crimes, until they are no longer taken seriously and can be considered only in terms of their ability to attract the spectators to a concrete TV station. Similarly, in the postmortal world death could become a commodity of show business, sold in the form of death holidays or resorts, advertizing a perfect euthanasia. The contemporary death rites allowing for designing one’s own funeral, or the fashion for turning the ashes of cremated people into jewelry, are early symptoms of how a good death could be imagined and enacted in a postmortal society.

As can be seen, the supreme condition for “good death” in a society that abolishes ageing and suffering is an autonomous decision not to prolong one’s existence, the reasons for which are mostly reliant on subjective opinions, moods, relationships, etc. This leaves much space for the influence of groups and ideologies shaping the individual beliefs of what constitutes the meaning of life. The choice of death and suffering would probably be a subjective decision, prone to external influence. The martyrdom in the name of religion or the altruistic sacrifice for the good of the planet could be examples of mortalist mindsets that would have to be respected even by the most adamantly “pro-life” advocates of immortality.

The delicate question would concern the reasons which drive today’s elderly to assisted suicide—depression, fatigue, frustration, the lack of close relationships, general malaise, could be perceived as forms of illness and thus not accepted by the postmortal society. The elimination of suffering in the immortalist agenda is not through death but through forced amelioration of self: the authenticity of one’s psychical pain and suffering would likely be denied in the society pursuing pleasure. Here the clash between the personal autonomy and the hedonistic imperative augurs the rise of the pleasure totalitarianism: institutionalized emotional “enhancement,” removing strong emotions, legitimizing some and abolishing others with the help of neurosurgery or pharmaceuticals. The violation of the autonomy principle would challenge the “goodness” of death—therefore, if an individual would, despite “paradise engineering,” experience unbearable existential problems, their choice would have to be held as binding, and they would have to be provided with the means to exercise the “right to die.”⁶¹

61. Pearce, “The Hedonistic Imperative.”; Hauskeller, *Mythologies of Transhumanism*; Lilley, *Transhumanism and Society*; More and Vita-More, *The Transhumanist Reader*.

Finally, the postmortal society would have to be characterized by general access to life-prolonging technologies; however, it is probable that such access and the range of available means of stalling ageing would depend on the economic status of individuals. The notion of a human as a financial burden on the society in general or on the closest people would still be applicable. Just like in the publicized case of Roger Foley (2018), in the event of lack of funds for healthcare, people could be offered assisted suicide as a form of saving their face and public resources. The notion of “goodness” here would be inscribed in the utilitarian framework: the voluntary assisted death would be good because it would ideally benefit the largest amount of other beings.

As can be seen, the most important indicators for permissibility of voluntary euthanasia stem from subjectivity. The individual experience of shame, pride, love, depression, obligation, etc., may be reason enough to choose a “real,” “personal” death, and call it “good.” Nowadays the bodily death is understood as entailing personal death, and such considerations are out of question. The introduction of non-moral values to the notion of euthanasia opens up only in the postmortal setting, and such instances can be envisioned as valid possibilities.

4.3. Insights from the Duty to Live vs. the Right to Die Debate

The duty to live is more often juxtaposed with the right to life, usually in the context of euthanatic deaths. It is underlined that they are not the same, and personal autonomy is defended. The postmortal environment, though, would probably alter the debate, as it happens in *Altered Carbon*. Rights and duties are here understood as stemming from the social order and the legal system. All citizens are granted the right to life: their *psyche* can be stored and revived in a natural or synthetic body. This also serves the good of the society in another manner: people can be brought back for criminal investigation, which makes it easier to catch criminals and to avoid punishing innocent people (in some selected cases, even with real death). It seems grave enough to create the duty to live—not for the sake of one’s own beliefs or one’s relatives, but to uphold the values of a law-abiding society.

For the postmortal Catholics it creates a number of problems. Firstly, such a revival would go against their understanding of death. Secondly, it would be sacrilegious treatment of the body: they probably would have to be put into somebody else’s body or into a synthetic sleeve. Thirdly, it would signify the acceptance of instrumental treatment of a human being that can be taken out or put into storage at somebody else’s request (or fancy). Fourthly, it would violate autonomous choice. Fifthly, as one

might imagine, it would create a precedent that could start a slippery slope and entice or even force Catholics to embrace reincarnation. Finally, considering that multiple resleeving is possible and this allows to torture one indefinitely, they may simply—and justly—be afraid. This is why they publicly protest and fight for the “right to die,” that is, not to be incarnated after they have been stored. The right to die would not grant the right to suicide, but the right not to accept the naturalistic approach to death and be not revived. Originally, they could claim “reasons of conscience,” but the legal case with a key Catholic witness pushed the authorities to propose Resolution 653, which would repeal the reasons of conscience for the purposes of investigation. As was mentioned above, their protests are presented as inept, amounting to distributing leaflets with slogans, without engaging into actual discussion.

It seems that Morgan, in his presentation of Catholics, confuses “conscience clause” with “patient autonomy”—or, at least, this would seem to be the case from the bioethical angle, where the reasons of conscience are debated usually in relation to the freedom of choice of a doctor rather than a patient. In the case described above, what in fact is proposed to be repealed is not conscience but autonomy, on the shaky grounds that autonomy involving reasons considered irrational (or simply: relating to non-naturalistic factors) should not be taken into account. Catholics would find themselves incapacitated before the law, as they—being stored on stack—cannot express their wishes, and the wishes declared by them during their embodiment would not be honored, as the wishes of a mentally unstable person would not be. What is more, it would bring their position close to the one of slaves, whose debasing treatment was socially sanctioned on the grounds of their supposed inferiority. This implies that repealing the reasons of conscience in *Altered Carbon* would bear the traces of a totalitarian practice.

It is worth thinking, then, if the Catholic obligations to respect authorities and respect all life do not require them to submit to the commonly acknowledged procedures, or accept them in certain cases. The argument that is often brought up today, that Christians are beholden to God, rather than to men, would certainly be not convincing for those who do not believe in God and they see how the Catholic choice contributes to the spread of evil and injustice because e.g. they refuse to provide evidence damning the criminal.

This situation can be compared to some cases known from today’s bioethical practice and that are hotly debated. One could be the case of a woman to whom abortion is recommended as a life-saving procedure. If she were forced to submit to the procedure, it would be a grave violation of

personal autonomy; however, it clashes with the obligation of the doctor to save life, and perhaps with her duties to her family. Another instance could be the case of parents who do not believe in the benefits of vaccination and consider it harmful or obtained by ethically questionable means, and thus do not allow their child to be immunized. Their wish can be honored as long as their choice does not threaten the wellbeing of the society: the utilitarian understanding of “good” can override the reasons of conscience. Finally, the case of Jehovah’s Witnesses who refuse e.g. blood transfusion for religious reasons. Similarly, their wishes are honored if expressed in accordance with the law, taking into account the basic human right to freedom to practice one’s religion. However, if the court finds that treatment in accordance with the precepts of the religion would be deleterious to the patient, the reasons of conscience can again be overridden in the event of danger to life. Contemporary examples show that in postmortal society patient autonomy and reasons of conscience can be seriously contested and perhaps overthrown.

Finally, one can ask the question if the choice of postmortal Catholics is an ethical or a religious choice. From their portrayal one can infer that it is motivated by religion, and based on “blind faith” rather than rational arguments. However, it needs to be remembered that this image is modeled on the present-day creationists and neo-Catholics who suffer bad press in general, and that it seems to be metonymic for other religious groups that in Anglophone countries have ambivalent, to say the least, cultural status (e.g. the seventeenth-century Puritans, the Amish). However, as could be seen from the above discussion, there is ample evidence that non-religious ethical questions such as autonomy, human rights, or dignity, also come into play, providing Catholics with a set of arguments for the support of their stance. Yet, it does not guarantee these arguments will be held as binding at all times—they may give grounds for a serious discussion and for working out detailed law that could be acceptable for them.

5. Do postmortal Catholics have “the right to die”?

What does all of this mean to Morgan’s Catholics? This way or another, they are equipped with cortical stacks like all members of future societies, so the preservation of their “life” is secured. Looking at the vision of Morgan, one can ask perversely: should Catholics embrace the “death culture”? Is the transhuman project “pro-life”? Are there any arguments that rationally support the stance of those that are called by the Altered Carbon universe characters “religious freaks”? By refusing to be reincarnated they obstruct justice and they expose themselves as easy victims who will not come back

to testify against their murderers. In fact, Kristin Ortega notices: “There are people out there who need us a lot worse than Bancroft does. Real-death victims who weren’t lucky enough to have remote storage when their stacks were blown out. Catholics getting butchered because their killers know the victims will never come out of storage to put them away.”⁶² Is the question of death worth (violently) dying for?

Relating to the first question, “death culture” celebrates death and secures the right to kill people on the egoistic grounds: not the freedom to adhere to some moral principle but the unlimited free will to further one’s own agenda.⁶³ In this sense, the postmortal Catholics cannot embrace it; nevertheless, there is no denying that in the immortalist society they are obligated by their religion to deepen and defend their own understanding of life and death. Rather than be classified under the existing labels that have little in common with their religion, they should restore *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, which would amount to living a “good life,” consequently leading to a “good death.” The transhumanist immortalism argues often that it is pro-life, treating death as an enemy to be vanquished. It makes evident the fundamental split between the naturalistic and non-naturalistic understanding of what life constitutes and whose life should in fact be protected. This is not solved in Morgan’s novel and likely will not be in reality, providing further motivation for the reflection on these basic categories of human experience.

Their choice of death in the postmortal world should not be confused with today’s “right to die” in euthanasia cases. Contemporarily, for many people the goodness of euthanasia lies in the elimination of suffering. If Pearce’s neohedonist utopia comes true and suffering will be abolished, the goodness of death will depend on the set of moral values and beliefs one holds, as well as solid anthropology, as it will motivate the approach to death and counteract suicide tourism or other forms of abuse of human dignity, e.g. imaginable multiple suicides for entertainment (because the mind could be restored). Further, today the right to die is associated with self-ownership: Catholics talk not so much about ownership but of mastery, and this mastery of oneself is to be achieved through death. In the postmortal world the right to die would signify perhaps the right to not

62. Morgan, *Altered Carbon*, 76.

63. Jakub Pawlikowski, “Prawo do wyrażania sprzeciwu sumienia przez personel medyczny – problemy etyczno-prawne,” accessed November 26, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311283210_Prawo_do_sprzeciwu_sumienia_w_medycynie_-_aspekty_etyczno-prawne.

be reincarnated and to be treated holistically, with respect to all parts of a human person: *pneuma*, *psyche* and *soma*.

Resurrection, according to Morgan’s Catholics, is the domain of God, and should not be appropriated by humans. It directly violates the First Commandment, as it puts human in the place of God, as the master of life and death. It is also incompatible with the linear vision of life and the holistic vision of man: it is impossible to resurrect only *soma* or *psyche* without *pneuma*. What is more, even non-religious characters admit that not the whole human being is retained via storage, so the consequent resurrection would necessarily be incomplete. This, in the Catholic understanding, would amount to the profanation of the body that is considered sacred; especially that as a result of the rise of the postmortal society it is often sold, dismembered and swapped between different people. Instrumental treatment of human beings is visible also in selling “souls” (cortical stacks), mindbites (pieces of consciousness), in torture and cross-sleeving.

Choosing to live forever within the naturalistic paradigm does not hold against the vision of the afterlife in Catholicism. The definition of life that immortalists seek to prolong is reduced to the few aspects not fully mapped out by science, such as brain activity or cellular self-repair. It definitely lacks distinction between or the acknowledgement of different facets of life, e.g. existence, personal history, experience, being, animation or spirit. The Catholics of the future would have a lot to lose by accepting the postmortal attitude, e.g. fulfillment, harmony and freedom. Death for them is the only way to restore the prelapsarian condition that is not to be traded by the inconveniences of multiple resleeving and the fight for pecuniary means to ensure the possibility to come to life in one’s own cloned body. What is more, Morgan’s Catholics believe that soul cannot be digitized, most probably because they understand it as a supernatural element (*pneuma*) that cannot be reduced to electrical impulses. It is difficult to imagine what would happen to *pneuma* within the holistic perception of a human being should the body and mind be compromised. Here, as is often the case in posthuman fiction, it is implied that animation is immaterial to the discussion of retaining identity (naturalistic view) or that it does not depend on humans as only God is the giver and taker of souls (religious view). In any case, there exists a tacit assumption that if a human is revived, their *pneuma* is also restored, not, however, by any known technological processes. In naturalistic view the supernatural part, obviously, is brought down to *psyche*, understood as e.g. consciousness or sentience.

The civic duties and legal and social responsibility are perhaps the most problematic factors. The support for the Catholic stance on the reasons of

conscience comes from Scripture (numerous places; most famously in the Acts, e.g. 4:19, 5:29), which gives them reason enough to obstruct justice and to become martyrs for their views. However, it creates a conflict with other precepts of their faith e.g. respect for authorities or respect for life. Neglecting to save somebody's life needs careful consideration for the existence of higher values. Bringing back the key Catholic witness is not, therefore, a black-and-white case; rather, it is the case of double effect. As contemporary practice shows, in such situations the reasons of conscience may happen to be discarded, and it allows to speculate that Resolution 653 will be upheld. The challenge concerns providing such a regulation that would prevent turning the precedent into the beginning of a slippery slope.

The problem with the fictional Catholics is that, at least on the surface, they provide arguments that from the start seem irrational, and engage in paradoxes they never explain. Despite the obvious limitations of the naturalistic approach, they fail to provide arguments to support their stance. For example, they never claim that upload is impossible, in accordance with their teachings, and try to specify its definition, but they resort to claiming that it is playing God, which does not help their case. There is much to be said in their defense but they never do it. In part it is the consequence of how religious groups are perceived by naturalists; however, it may also be the reflection of the fact that the faithful do not know the actual teachings and do not seek rational arguments themselves, which may produce disastrous results. In the novel we can observe that at least some of the non-Catholic majority try to find the value and meaning in human life, and that they try to adhere to the principles that could form a shared ground with Catholics, were they only able to formulate and voice these principles. Takeshi Kovacs, the main character—a multiple resleever and hired assassin—attempts to understand Catholics, and to hold on to a value code that by naturalist standards is irrational: he seems to repose on the ideology of Quellcrist Falconer, somewhat funnily juxtaposed with Shakespeare as a moral authority, guiding non-religious people. Ultimately “you can never figure out human beings,” and people pay a lot for a touch of “humanity.”⁶⁴ Morgan shows that pure egoistical immortalism is not the answer to all questions of existence, and that in a postmortal world people have a need to believe in something, to give meaning to their life and death.

64. See Morgan, *Altered Carbon*, 162–5.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As can be concluded, the issue of death will not become negligent in the postmortal society—it will be of primary importance. The harbingers of certain behaviors suggestive of individual “death control” and symbolic death practices are already here in the form of tattoos, workshops, scarification, etc. The trend of death daily rehearsed⁶⁵ may in the future change into a series of “preparatory” deaths leading to euthanasia, understood as the voluntary permanent effacement of both bodily and personal levels of being. The learning of the art of dying is far from being forgotten: rather, the reflection on what good death constitutes, what means and motivations make it permissible will perhaps be more imminent than today. If humanity attains the postmortal status, and the economic and emotional factors leading one to taking one’s life will be managed and regulated by the enhanced society with the use of super-intelligence and augmented limbic system, the discussion on death will no longer be a matter of debating the issues connected with distributive justice and individual psyche. The battle over the right to die will be the one waged in the realm of values and beliefs for which one will decide to lay one’s life. This makes bioethics of the future primarily interested in and directly responsible for the outcome of this struggle, as of now, little discussed, which makes further study of this subject imperative.

65. Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, 10.

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