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MORTALITY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL ISSUE: THANATOLOGY, NORMATIVITY, AND "HUMAN NATURE"

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This paper examines mortality—the fact that we humans are all going to die—as an issue in philosophical anthropology, by applying a fourfold typology of some key forms of philosophical anthropology to the topic of death and mortality. First, this typology, originally suggested by Heikki Kannisto, is outlined; the mortality issue is, then, viewed from the perspective it opens. Finally, the challenges to our understanding of death and mortality that this perspective may help us meet are discussed. The treatment of mortality from the perspective of philosophical anthropology may make it more understandable in a manner that will highlight the importance of the concept of normativity in the philosophical examination of any such humanly relevant issue.

Keywords: Death; mortality; human nature; philosophical anthropology; normativity.

Introduction

This paper will examine mortality—the undeniable fact that we humans are all going to die—as an issue in philosophical anthropology. The main purpose of the essay is to apply clarifying typology of some key forms of philosophical anthropology to the topic of death and mortality. I will first briefly describe this typology (section 2) and then take a look at the mortality issue as viewed from the perspective it opens (section 3), in order to move on to a discussion of the various challenges to our understanding of death and mortality that this perspective may help us meet (section 4). A brief concluding section 5 will then draw the discussion to a close.

The typology I will outline and apply to the specific philosophical-anthropological issue of (human) death was originally proposed by Heikki Kannisto (1984), who describes a fourfold field of ideal types of philosophical conceptions of humanity (see also Pihlström 2003). My aims in this paper are not merely classificatory, however, although that is an aspect of the application of Kannisto's framework I will sketch. More generally, the treatment of mortality from the perspective of philosophical anthropology may, I hope, make it more understandable—or at least its unintelligibility more "humanly relevant"—in a

manner that will highlight the importance of the concept of *normativity* in the philosophical examination of any such humanly relevant issue.

A number of basic concepts to be invoked in what follows need some explication. First, *philosophical anthropology*, though often used to refer to a particular (German) school, which flourished in the early half of the twentieth century and was influenced by such movements as *Lebensphilosophie*, phenomenology, and existentialism (see Scheler 1919, 1954, Rickman 1960, Pappé 1967, Weiland 1995), here stands for any philosophical investigation of "human nature", or the being of human beings. Philosophical anthropology, in my view, is not restricted to non-empirical, purely *a priori* investigation of the essential properties of human nature. No timeless essence of humanity is presupposed; rather, only a "softer" and admittedly problematic distinction between the human and the non-human must be drawn (see Kainz 1981, Schacht 1990, 1995). Indeed, it is part of the research within philosophical anthropology to examine how exactly such distinctions ought to be drawn. Philosophy may contribute, along with the special sciences (including humanities and the social sciences), to the drawing of such distinctions, or at least inquire into the conceptual background assumptions that it can be drawn in some particular manner. Obviously, it is not easy to reserve a special role for philosophy here, if we wish to avoid sliding into essentialist presuppositions, on the one side, and reducing philosophy to mere empirical inquiry, on the other. If philosophical anthropology were understood as mere empirical anthropology, or if philosophical questions about humanity were regarded as mere empirical questions, then presumably philosophical anthropology would be eliminated altogether (Rickman 1985, Zaner 1966).

I will certainly not even try to explicitly define "philosophical anthropology" or "human nature" here, but it must be kept in mind that this field of inquiry usually deals with *normative* issues in addition to merely empirical or factual ones: the philosophical anthropologist typically engages in a normative evaluation of the "human condition", often arguing that there is something wrong with human existence as we know it, that it is, therefore, problematic to be a human being, and that something must be done in order to correct this situation (see Stevenson, Haberman 1998, Pihlström 2003). Thus, we are concerned not only with the "is" but also with the "ought", with how we ought to live our lives as human beings.

When applied to death and mortality, philosophical anthropology turns into what is sometimes called *philosophical thanatology*, the philosophical examination of death, mortality, and (possibly) immortality (see Pihlström 2001, 2002). When characterized in this way, philosophical thanatology is simply a special field of philosophical anthropology, dealing with certain special issues about human beings. Accordingly, it is also supposed to be a (partly) non-empirical inquiry into normative issues surrounding human mortality. It must be distinguished from merely empirical, factual inquiries seeking answers to straightforwardly factual questions about death, be they natural-scientific ones about the ways in which the

human organism may be killed by, say, various diseases, or historical and social-scientific ones about the ways in which the phenomenon of death is or has been understood in different cultures. On the other hand, philosophical thanatology may approach the concept of death from a more general perspective not restricted to human mortality. For example, the very *meaning* of the concept of death may be discussed, and this meaning may, for instance, be distinguished from the (observable) *criteria* of death. This distinction will not be discussed here in any detail, but it must be understood that our ways of reacting to such conceptual issues will affect our ways of dealing with, say, moral questions about the justification of various death-related decisions and practices, such as euthanasia or abortion (see Feldman 1992, 1998, Harris 1998). Difficult conceptual problems can be identified—and to some extent clarified by means of philosophical analysis—when thanatological inquiry is directed, for example, at the identity of the subject who undergoes the process of dying and who might perhaps (be thought to) survive bodily death (cf. Flew 1987, Feldman 1992, Rosenberg 1998).

Moreover, in analytic philosophical thanatology (if such an expression does not sound too weird), there has been a long dispute, especially since Thomas Nagel's (1979, 1986) work, on whether death is *evil* for the one who dies. The Epicurean tradition, following Lucretius (1951), says it is not, because after death there is no one to experience anything's being good or evil any longer, but a number of contemporary theorists of death have denied this, arguing that death, especially premature death, deprives the person of a number of good things life might bring with it (see again Feldman 1992, as well as the discussion in Fischer 1993 and Malpas, Solomon 1998).

I am not at all convinced that the analytic paradigm in philosophical discussions of death is helpful in understanding the phenomenon of mortality in its human complexity (cf. Pihlström 2001, 2002). This paradigm is mentioned here basically in order to provide a relatively familiar contrast to the kind of reflection on human mortality I will in this article engage in. Nor, however, am I convinced that the treatments of mortality within "Continental" philosophy, given their often impenetrable textual structure, really help the person leading a mortal life and existentially worried about it. The kind of philosophical-anthropological approach I will sketch may, despite—or perhaps rather because of—its relative simplicity, help us at least in distinguishing between the positions (or lines of argument) worth taking seriously.

The Basic Framework

I will now briefly introduce Kannisto's (1984) fourfold framework of ideal types of philosophical anthropology (see also Pihlström 2003). These four ideal types, which are only seldom represented in their pure forms but are usually mixed up in any individual thinker's work, are (i) essentialism, (ii) naturalism, (iii) existentialism,

and (iv) culturalism. To understand the relations and tensions between them is not a trivial task, despite the apparent simplicity of the typology. A key to this fourfold division and its applications is the distinction between the "normative order" that essentialism treats as "cosmic" or universal, and culturalism as humanly constructed, on the one hand, and the merely factual world-order that naturalism offers as a replacement of such irreducible normativity. Existentialism, finally, denies that *any* order, normative or factual, is binding for humans. I will now describe these views in some more detail, and thereafter move to their thanatological applications.

(i) *Essentialist* philosophical anthropologies attempt to reveal a timeless, unchanging, immutable, metaphysical essence of humanity, the necessary and sufficient (and therefore "essential") properties that make human beings humans and separate them from the rest of the world. Plato and Aristotle were obviously essentialists; indeed, some of the best known short definitions of "human nature" (e.g., "man is a rational animal") can be traced back to their work. Christian thinkers have usually been essentialists, too. Accordingly, it is easy to see that essentialism can cover quite a variety of different philosophical anthropologies, ranging from Aristotelianism to Christian conceptions of human beings as "images of God". In any event, normativity plays a crucial role in these views, their many differences notwithstanding. The essence of human beings, or "human nature" in the essentialist sense, is normative in the sense that it not only tells us what kind of beings we in fact are but also encourages us to be as fully human as we can, to fulfil our essence. The essence of humanity is not simply a matter of what we are; it is also a matter of what we ought to be. In a Platonic jargon, it is up to the highest level of the human soul to be in touch with the world of eternal Forms, the highest among which is the Form of the Good. Aristotle's cosmic world-order, though somewhat more down to earth, is hardly less normative.

(ii) *Naturalism* arises as a result of the great advancement of the natural sciences in the modern age. Learning the lessons these sciences teach us, we are supposed to realize that there is no cosmic normative world-order at all. In other words, whatever task we thought such a postulation to achieve, we should be satisfied with a mere natural, factual world-order. Seen from the perspective of natural science, human beings occupy their distinctive place in the world among other natural beings, but this place is not normatively distinguished. (This is the basic meaning of "naturalism" here; I am of course aware of the fact that philosophers speak about naturalism in several different ways. Cf., e.g., Keil, Schnädelbach 2000, Pihlström, Koskinen 2001.) The kind of objective normativity defining our essence in an Aristotelian (or Christian) fashion is simply outdated, lacking scientific and more generally rational justification. We have to understand that we are mere natural creatures, contingently existing in the natural world, which is in itself entirely contingent. Philosophical anthropology can legitimately aim at nothing more than empirical results about the factual, natural features of human life. In order to understand human existence, we had better take a look at the

relevant sciences, viz., physico-chemical, biological, and social-scientific pictures of humanity. Philosophy can no longer occupy a superior standpoint; it is at best a handmaiden of those special sciences. "Human nature" no longer means essence; the essentialistic "order" that the Greeks and the Christians used to believe in is naturalized and factualized without remainder.

(iii) *Existentialism* is another—quite different—way of "negating" essentialism's original search for human nature. Instead of merely factualizing the normative order essentialism regarded as objective and cosmic, existentialism denies that human beings are bound by any such order, either natural or normative. Of course existentialists do not claim that human beings are free to breach, say, the laws of nature, such as gravity. But they do urge that the existing subject is radically free to interpret and reinterpret her/his existential situation in a manner not restricted by any of the previously existing orders. The subject does find itself "thrown into the world" amidst natural and political contingencies, but in this situation it is precisely up to the subject her/himself to create and/or maintain any order, normative or factual, there can be in human life. No prior order, either normative or factual, constrains the subject's constructions. We are radically free, sentenced to freedom, as Sartre famously claims—radically free, that is, to construct and reconstruct our lives in the context of the various contingencies we cannot change. And we are also responsible for everything we do. As another well-known Sartrean slogan goes, existence precedes essence. There is no essence—no timeless image—of what human beings inherently are, prior to an individual's leading her/his life through its worldly contingencies. The world itself, just as the life thrown into it, is objectively speaking absurd, but again it is the individual her/himself who is responsible for creating any meaning or significance life might have. Celebrating the autonomy and the resulting responsibility of the individual, existentialism is opposed to the naturalistic tendency to see human beings as ultimately mere physical bits of matter. But it is also opposed to the essentialists' original urge for a timeless essence more fundamental than an individual, concrete human life.

(iv) *Culturalism* is the fourth, and in many ways the most promising, option in Kannisto's fourfold scheme. It can be seen as a compromise or a synthesis, with a willingness to learn something from all the three other types of philosophical anthropology. According to culturalism, human existence is irreducibly cultural, and hence also socio-historical. Human beings inevitably live within a normative cultural framework constitutive of their very humanity. The culturalist sympathizes with the original essentialist search for normatively defining characteristics of human nature, but s/he has learned from both naturalists and existentialists that such an urge cannot be satisfied in its "perennial" form. It is, however, difficult to follow either naturalism or existentialism all the way down to the full reduction of human beings to mere material objects in motion (as a radical reductive physicalist, such as W.V. Quine, might put it), or to the equally radical affirmation, with Sartrean existentialists, that humans are free without limits and that no underlying

picture of the basic characteristics of humanity—or no prior normative order—is needed at all in an individual's life. What these understandable criticisms of essentialism yield is either scientistic reductionism (naturalism) or subjectivism and relativism (existentialism). In order to avoid these extremes, and to preserve something from the essentialist project, the culturalist affirms that we do live within a "normative order"; however, this order has been made, and is constantly restructured, by no one else than us humans—though not simply as individuals but as socio-cultural beings amidst various practices. We are ourselves the architects of the "human world" we live in; this world wears on its sleeve the image of us as language-using, purposive, goal-oriented beings. No ready-made, cosmic, normative structure sets us a model of how human life ought to be led in order to qualify as human (as essentialism thought); nor can we live without any such normative order, however (as both naturalism and existentialism, in their different ways, claim). Rather, we are "always already" parts of a humanly structured normative, but endlessly reinterpretable, cultural order. The human world is a cultural world.

Whereas essentialism has been primarily represented by classical ancient philosophy (e.g., Aristotle) as well as Christian thought (e.g., Aquinas), naturalism by thinkers strongly emphasizing the results of modern natural science (culminating in such naturalist heroes of the twentieth century as Quine), and existentialism by such modern classics as Heidegger and Sartre, the paradigmatic cases of culturalism can be found in Wittgensteinian philosophy of language, investigating the ways in which the meanings of language are tied up with human forms of life (see especially Wittgenstein 1953; cf. Lear 1998), or other twentieth-century systems emphasizing human beings as symbol-users. For example, according to Ernst Cassirer (1944), humans are symbol-using animals (*animal symbolicum*), living in a "symbolic universe" in addition to the physical universe (see also Rickman 1960, Landmann 1982, Schacht 1990). More generally, we may say that culturalism has Kantian roots, not only in Immanuel Kant's own transcendental philosophy, seeking to understand the basic structure of human cognition and the world as the object of such cognition, but in the (arguably) transcendental investigations of such later Kantians as Cassirer and Wittgenstein—or, closer to our own day, Charles Taylor (1989, 1995), who has repeatedly argued against reductive naturalizations of human agency and personhood. (On culturalism see also, e.g., Schnädelbach 2000.)

The normativity associated with linguistic meaning and symbol-use in general (let alone with knowledge, rationality, and science) cannot, according to culturalists, be reductively analyzed in terms of natural facts and regularities, although prominent philosophers nowadays work within "naturalized semantics" and "naturalized epistemology". On the contrary, it is part of "human nature" as it is given to us in and through our human practices that normativity cannot be eliminated, or reduced to anything non-normative (see also Pihlström 1998). Culturalism insists that it is humanly natural to engage in normatively organized

practices and that reducing or eliminating their normativity would in fact be tantamount to eliminating a crucial feature of natural human existence. Thus, I would be prepared to classify, e.g., John McDowell's (1996) conception of "second nature" as a basically culturalist idea. According to McDowell, even perceptual experience requires the actualization of specifically human capacities that are acquired through cultural education, or *Bildung*—capacities the acquiring of which is a fully natural feature of human life and development. As McDowell often puts it, the normativity associated with our "second nature" cannot be reduced to nature as a realm of law, or nature as investigated by the natural sciences. (On philosophical problems with naturalizing normativity, see also several essays, including McDowell's in de Caro, Macarthur 2004.)

Yet, culturalism is prepared to learn new facts about human life from the various natural and social sciences investigating humanity. There is, for culturalists, no excuse for being blind to scientific progress, simply because science is part of human culture, a cultural practice itself irreducibly normatively structured. Culturalism, moreover, needs to live with, and constantly seek to reconcile, the tension between an existentialist emphasis on individual autonomy and a naturalistic emphasis on the objective surroundings that set limits to individuals (cf. Weiland 1995). This reconciliation can at least be attempted by appreciating the human-made nature of the normative world-order we cannot help but live within.

Applying the Framework

How does the human phenomenon of death look like, if seen from the perspectives of these different philosophical anthropologies? Is mortality, or perhaps immortality, part of the essence of humanity? Is death a mere natural factuality? Are we essentially individuals living toward our personal deaths? Or is death primarily a cultural phenomenon? How, in particular, does the concept of normativity relate to our need to make sense of our mortal lives? The four basic types distinguished in the previous section seem to yield the following general reactions to the issues of death and mortality.

(i) *Essentialist* accounts of human death and mortality (especially Christianity and other religious views on humanity) traditionally postulate an immortal soul or spirit, even though not all religiously inspired defences of immortality are essentialist, as is witnessed by the American pragmatists' Charles S. Peirce's and William James's beliefs in immortality (Pihlström 2002), and not all essentialist philosophical anthropologies postulate an individual immortal soul (e.g., Aristotle's does not). Typically, essentialist theories view human beings as only apparently mortal. Even though the human body will unavoidably cease to exist after death, the true essence of the human being, the immortal soul, will live on. The conceptual basis of this kind of a view is something like Cartesian dualism. Alternatively, if the inseparability of body and soul is emphasized, as in more

traditional Christianity, it is argued that the entire human being will be resurrected on the "last day" and will be either rewarded or punished, depending on the kind of life s/he led on the earth. Broadly speaking, it is precisely the immaterial and immortal soul—however it is conceived in more detail—the highest "level" of a human being, that is claimed to be in touch with the normative world-order central to essentialist theories in general. Whether a human being deserves immortality or resurrection depends, of course, on the quality of her/his earthly life, especially on the way in which s/he has been able to build a connection to the divinely established normative sphere in and through her/his life.

(ii) *Naturalist* views usually criticize these immortality "dreams" of the essentialists as, precisely, mere dreams. There really is nothing like the immortal soul (or its various equivalents pictured in different religious traditions). Death must be viewed as a purely natural, worldly fact or phenomenon. As there is nothing to seriously qualify as the subject that survives death, the very idea of survival or immortality must be rejected as unscientific. No sane scientifically-minded person should believe in immortality. Death is the final and irreversible cessation of the process of life. This kind of naturalism, or materialism, is the paradigm of recent analytic philosophical thanatology, defining the context within which it may be examined whether or not, e.g., death is evil for the one who dies (see, again, Flew 1987, Feldman 1992, Fischer 1993, Rosenberg 1998, and other relevant sources cited above).

(iii) *Existentialist* views are the ones that most emphatically stress human mortality and its significance for understanding human existence in general, famously captured in Martin Heidegger's (1927) notion of *Sein-zum-Tode* and the related pursuit of authenticity which has its roots in earlier proto-existentialists, including Kierkegaard. In the existentialist setting, the individual, personal nature of death is very strongly emphasized: I can only live my own life and face my own death; no one can take my place. The full, profound acknowledgment of this basic feature of human *Dasein* is the only route to authenticity. If I refuse to acknowledge my mortality, and the deeply individual nature of my mortality, then I am leading the life of *Das Man*, the anonymous subject whose existence remains inauthentic. Existentialism, especially in its Heideggerian phase (though we must keep in mind that Heidegger himself never approved of this label), also reminds us that it is really only human beings that *can* die. Only humans are mortals, whereas other living beings, that is, plants and animals, can only perish, or cease to exist; they are not genuinely mortal, and their being is not being toward death.

(iv) *Culturalist* views seek to understand death and mortality (and the possible search or hope for immortality or survival, often in a religious context) as socio-cultural issues and phenomena, describable and to some extent explainable and understandable from the point of view of empirical anthropological and/or cultural-historical studies on the significance of death, and the related rituals, etc., in various cultures and historical epochs. More philosophically, a culturalist

philosophical anthropology may thematize mortality as part of the "normative order" human beings create and (re)structure for themselves, as part of our symbolically articulated self-understanding of human life as mortal life—a self-understanding that is, again, in most cultures at least to some extent religiously manifested and transmitted. Living in the "human world" (cf. section 2 above), we humans live a mortal life. This mortality is part of the cultural normative order we have set for ourselves, although it is also part of this same cultural order to investigate the biological facts about death and dying by means of natural-scientific methods, abstracted from specific cultural contexts. The culturalist does not claim that the fact that humans die is somehow culturally dependent (in an obviously implausible factual or empirical sense)—as if there could be an exotic culture whose members are immortal! Rather, the culturalist views human mortality as one of the biologically based phenomena that need to be received and interpreted in virtually all cultures we are able to recognize as human. In this sense, it resembles other deep features of human life, such as birth (natality), parenthood, or sexuality.

Again, having described these positions in broad strokes, I must note that the applications of the ideal types identified in the previous section to the subject-matter of the present section is far from straightforward. As already emphasized, hardly any individual thinker (excluding the most obvious paradigmatic cases, such as Aristotle) can be said to have represented any one of the ideal types in a pure form. Accordingly, the applications of these types to mortality cannot be represented in a pure form, either, or can only very seldom be. There is enormous variation in the ways in which philosophers philosophize about death and mortality, but it is in my view perfectly plausible to categorize these ways in terms of the fourfold structure I have adopted from Kannisto's scheme. The four ideal types seem to mirror something that is going on in philosophical thanatology, just as they mirror some of the dialectical moves in philosophical anthropology more generally.

Challenges

I am now finally able to move to the most important part of my paper. At least the following challenges to our understanding of death and mortality—to any adequate philosophical thanatology—can, I would like to suggest, be discussed on the basis of the application of our fourfold framework. Again, the notion of normativity is crucial in many of the challenges I will identify, although I can here describe its relevance only very briefly.

(i) The *subjective, individual, personal* nature of death and mortality—the primacy of *my* death in comparison to anyone else's—is a problem that cannot be set aside in thanatological reflections. Does our philosophical-anthropological reflection help us in dealing with this aspect of death and dying, that is, with the inevitability of occupying a "first person point of view"? Perhaps, if we admit that death indeed has many aspects, manifested in the different philosophical-

anthropological perspectives from which it can be viewed, as differentiated in the previous section. The contrast between existentialism and culturalism—and the aspects of mortality each of them emphasizes—is crucial here. It is a key existentialist point that only one's own death can be authentically faced as an existing subject—to the extent that existentialist treatments of death, not only in classics like Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, but also in quite different works, including Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1921), can be said to be "solipsistic" (Pihlström 2001, 2004). The question arises whether the existentialist, viewing death and mortality as "my business", irreducibly mine, can ever adequately acknowledge the mortal "Other"—or what some thinkers regard as the ethical priority of the other's mortality to my own (cf. Leman-Stefanovic 1987, Levinas 1989, Bauman 1992). Because of its solipsistic tendencies, existentialist philosophical thanatology tends to be too narrow and one-sided, recognizing only one crucial aspect of human mortality. On the other hand, solipsism itself is a philosophical problem that surprisingly easily returns even in the ethical attempts to set the "Other" as primary, because it is eventually *my* duty, and mine alone, to acknowledge otherness, and the Other's mortality (cf. again Pihlström 2001, 2004). In any event, if death is simply "my own business", it will remain unclear whether any normative criteria can be used to decide whether I succeed or fail in authentically facing my death, or in coming to terms with my mortality.

(ii) *Immortality* seems to be an outdated issue, given the overwhelming evidence we have for a (broadly speaking) natural-scientific picture of human life and death. Is there, then, any philosophically justifiable hope to articulate this concept in today's scientific culture? One of the few options to be taken seriously here is Jamesian pragmatism, which (I would urge) is to be understood as a Kantian-like ethically engaged approach to mor(t)ality and religion, viewing the issue of immortality from the perspective of "practical reason", in close analogy to the way in which Kant himself regarded the immortality of the soul as one of his "postulates of practical reason" (cf. Pihlström 2002). This is not the place to argue in any detail for a Jamesian investigation of immortality, however. The issue is entangled with issue (i), because James was in his own distinctive way an "existentialist" thinker, too. Furthermore, we may ask whether immortality ought to be approached from a subjective (existentialist) or a culturalist perspective, given that essentialist accounts of the immortal soul (in traditional Christian style, or in terms of Cartesian dualism) is a non-starter. Perhaps immortality could be understood as a cultural issue, pure and simple? But then, would anything really remain from the subjective individual's religious hope for immortality? If the hope for and the possibility of immortality (however remote) are simply reduced to facts about how these problems are viewed in different cultures, philosophical anthropology (or thanatology) has again been reduced to its empirical counterpart. Normative questions emerge, again, as soon as it is realized that the problem of immortality is not only the metaphysical problem of whether there *is* an immortal

soul but also the problem of whether a certain kind of life, or (metaphorically speaking) a certain kind of "soul", could be thought to be "entitled to" the kind of immortality some religions promise.

(iii) In addition to these reflections, we may take up a further question (already explored in Kannisto 1984 and Pihlström 2003): does culturalism, either generally or in its specific thanatological applications, entail *cultural relativism*? That is, is there any objective truth, scientific or otherwise, about cultural phenomena, or culturally interpreted natural phenomena, such as death and mortality (or historically developed beliefs about immortality, for that matter)? Cultural relativism, as an apparently natural outcome of culturalist reflections on human existence as tied to one or another culturally established normative framework, threatens to "refactualize" the normative order that culturalism itself sought to re-erect on the ruins of essentialism that the naturalist "factualization" of essentialism's original normative (cosmic) world order left behind. If the cultural normative order that gives structure to the "human world" we live in is simply one or another order contingently established and maintained within a particular culture or society, then it is not a genuinely normative order, after all. Culturalism threatens to collapse into naturalism, if naturalism is understood broadly enough as the replacement of a normative world-order by a contingent, factual one. In the case of mortality, what this would mean is the replacement of the genuine, substantial issue of what leading a mortal life (or hoping for immortality) is by the question of how this issue has been articulated in various cultural spheres, communities, or historical societies. Mortality as a personally serious issue would then be lost—with the devastating result, again, of abolishing philosophical anthropology (or philosophical thanatology). Incidentally, we may note that the threat of "refactualization" is not restricted to cultural relativism (or even culturalism). A similar outcome haunts basically all philosophical anthropologies, insofar as they may in the end be reduced to the cosmic order ultimately indifferent to human pursuits (essentialism), contingent subjective commitments (existentialism), or natural facts (naturalism). The essentialist's objective normativity might in the end be something that brutely and inexplicably exists, something that we merely find in the cosmos surrounding us, just as the naturalist's way of accounting for normativity as an outcome of complex natural processes is inadequate for someone willing to save "genuine", irreducible normativity. Even the existentialist may, in the end, reduce normativity to an individuals' choices, which are fundamentally inexplicable. In all these cases, normativity may end up being refactualized, or reduced to a set of mere facts, either about the cosmos, about the natural world, or about individual human beings' decisions.

(iv) Both philosophical anthropology and philosophical thanatology may, if their Kantian background is emphasized, be understood as *transcendental* inquiries reflecting on the necessary conditions for the possibility of certain humanly "given" phenomena (Pihlström 2001, 2002, 2003). Even "Wittgensteinians" like

Peter Winch (1972) tend to view death (along with birth and sexuality) as one of the "limiting" concepts or phenomena constitutive of human life as we know it. This can be compared to a transcendental investigation of such concepts as expressing culturally and historically contextualized and transformable, yet contextually necessary, preconditions for human life (cf. also Pihlström 2005). It is a serious challenge for philosophical anthropology and philosophical thanatology to examine what such conditionality actually amounts to and, in particular, how its modal status could be made more precise. What does it mean to say that mortality is a condition for the very *possibility* of human life, or of any *possible* life we *could* recognize as human? This must, presumably, be something quite different from the mere factual recognition that in the actual world all humans die. On the other hand, it is hardly an analytic or conceptually necessary truth, let alone a logical truth, that all humans die. We can imagine a possible world in which all humans do not die. From a transcendental perspective, we would, however, hardly recognize this abstract possibility as relevant in philosophical thanatology. Our task is to understand, transcendentally as I suggested, *this* mortal life of ours, in *this* world, yet in a manner somehow "deeper" than any mere factual investigation of the 100% mortality rate ascribable to humans in this world. To speak about the latter as a serious candidate for a philosophically interesting examination of the inevitability of human mortality would be a joke rather than a proper suggestion for philosophical research. (A more interesting task is to understand why it would be a joke.) The philosophical anthropologist, and likewise the philosophical thanatologist, is situated somewhere between the scientist investigating factual reality (the actual world and its states of affairs) and the metaphysician speculating about possible worlds. The transcendental approach limits our perspective to this "human world" we contingently inhabit; yet, the results we hope to achieve by means of this approach are not modally neutral. We do make claims about what is possible for us humans, and the philosophical task here is to throw some more light on the modal status of such claims.

(v) Mortality, when considered in the context of philosophical anthropology, is an example of a problem requiring not only *metaphysical* attention (e.g., in terms of possible worlds metaphysics, as just described) and *epistemological* or *semantic* attention (e.g., in terms of transcendental philosophy, as suggested), but also *ethical* attention (as already noted in relation to existentialist views on death and their problems with solipsism and otherness). More radically, we might suggest that mortality is a problem whose metaphysical and ethical aspects are so intimately entangled with each other that they turn out to be inseparable. It is impossible, *for us mortals*, to inquire into the concept of mortality, and/or its significance in human life, without taking an ethical stance to the question of what it is to lead a decent life *as* a mortal being amidst other mortals. There is no *prior* metaphysical question of what death "is" and no *prior* semantic question of what the corresponding terms mean. (Nor is there a prior empirical or purely factual

question about these issues, for that matter.) Thus, the ethical issue of how to face mortality is *ipso facto* a metaphysical one, thematizing the normative meaning (or even the "essence") of mortality for us, "existentially" viewed. Furthermore, this account of the profound entanglement of metaphysical and ethical perspectives on death (or, *mutatis mutandis*, other humanly important phenomena, including perhaps birth) can itself be formulated ethically: there are *moral reasons* for the view that ethical and metaphysical treatments of death cannot be separated, and that (more metaphilosophically) metaphysics is not prior to ethics but deeply and pervasively entangled with it. This suggestion is opposed to the orthodoxy of analytic philosophical thanatology, according to which the metaphysics of death ought to be set straight first, in order to turn to ethical questions afterwards (see, again, Feldman 1992, Fischer 1993, Rosenberg 1998). Again, this is something I have already proposed on another occasion, in a slightly different context (Pihlström 2002), so I will not dwell on the point here, although I do want to re-emphasize its importance, not only for philosophical anthropology and thanatology but, more metaphilosophically, for our understanding of the relations between such central philosophical disciplines as metaphysics and ethics (see also Pihlström 2006).

(vi) One might also wonder how different philosophical-anthropological background ideas affect one's account of such special cases of death as abortion, euthanasia, murder, suicide, capital punishment, and death in war. These more "applied" issues are obviously beyond the scope of this essay. One general warning is in order, however. I am certainly not saying that we should "first" develop a philosophical anthropology, and on its basis a general philosophical thanatology, and only then apply it to such cases. On the contrary, our pre-understanding of these cases, as profoundly ethically relevant cases of human death, cases in which our mortality is often dramatically concretized, inevitably contributes to our ability to pose and respond to the metaphysical challenges that then again (circularly) contribute to our understanding of the "cases" themselves. We might, for example, be absolutely convinced that murder is wrong, always and for everyone. With this moral conviction in place, we might go on to examine what we take to be central philosophical-anthropological questions about human mortality. In such an examination, we would not need to "bracket" the specific ethical convictions we start with; on the contrary, we should be encouraged to bring all relevant factors into the *holistic* discussion of various factual and normative statements and hypotheses relevant to the phenomena we would be examining (cf. also White 2002).

(vii) I will finally venture a general suggestion. My proposal for a (transcendental) philosophical-anthropological-thanatological reconceptualization of these diverse philosophical issues about, and surrounding, human mortality offers by far more promising tools for investigating death and mortality in their diversity than standard (either dogmatically analytic or dogmatically phenomenological-cum-existentialist) conceptualizations that are simply too narrow to deal with these issues in a manner adequate to their human complexity.

This is *not* to say that such narrower conceptualizations would not be important in their own specific contexts. Nor do I wish to underemphasize the importance of empirical work on these matters, e.g., within cultural anthropology, history, or even medical science (see, e.g., Elias 1982). What I am saying that human mortality ought to be understood as a more holistic phenomenon, accommodating features from various fields of philosophical anthropology, emphasized in the different ideal types of philosophical anthropology examined above. We ought to be able to set aside the dream of engaging in philosophy as a science-like activity, solving well-defined problems whose solutions are "out there" in the world, only waiting to be discovered. Philosophy, even philosophical thanatology, can surely be characterized as a rational inquiry, but it is a very special kind of inquiry (cf. Pihlström 2005). Its problems are only gradually constructed through our own ways of living with them, and ways of letting them emerge in the contexts of our lives—contexts that are themselves emergent features of their historical backgrounds and various other contextual factors—and our "solutions" to these problems are also personal attempts to live with them in a responsible way. The relevant context for a philosophical reflection on human mortality is hardly ever an imagined "context without context", the metaphysician's transcendent "God's-Eye View", from which we ought to determine what death, or any other phenomenon, really is. To pursue philosophical anthropology and philosophical thanatology from within human life itself, as partly defined by its mortality (i.e., the very object of investigation in these fields), is to pursue it in a Kantian transcendental style, as a normatively engaged philosophical self-reflection on the conditions that must already be in place for such a reflection to be itself possible. It is only in and through mortal life itself that we can examine this life with the kind of seriousness we attach to it. (See Pihlström 2001, 2002; on the difference between the transcendent and the transcendental, see, e.g., Pihlström 2006.)

Conclusion

Even though my method of first identifying some basic types of philosophical conceptions of humanity and then applying them to the human issue of mortality is pretty straightforward, the further philosophical work to be done in this field is certainly not. A lot needs to be settled after this groundwork, with which I have merely been able to scratch the surface. In particular, the concept of normativity needs further elucidation. In this paper, I have merely tried to show how this concept is relevant to philosophical anthropology and philosophical thanatology in a number of different ways, manifested in the various challenges we face when attempting to understand, and to "come to terms with", our mortality in terms of the framework of philosophical-anthropological positions I sketched.

By way of conclusion, I simply want to draw attention to the fact that philosophy itself largely arises from the recognition of mortality. After all, Socrates's speech

before his death, as reported to us by Plato in *Phaedo*, is one of the major sources of Western philosophy in general, though only very few philosophers regard Socrates's (or Plato's) "proofs" of the immortality of the soul as sound. It is, given this fact about the very origins of philosophy as we know it, somewhat surprising that philosophical thanatology (just like philosophical anthropology) is on a side track in contemporary philosophy. According to Miguel de Unamuno (1913), the human craving for immortality is the basis of all philosophical and religious thought. Philosophy itself can be, and has been, described as a "preparation for death" (Hartle 1986), and thus as an activity which presupposes mortality, even when theorizing about immortality. This is also true about the kind of immortality reflections William James provided us with (cf. Pihlström 2002).

Even if we end up with a philosophical anthropology that renders our instinctive hope for immortality rational, or (more modestly) not entirely implausible, we cannot hide the fact of human mortality from our view. Any humanly relevant philosophical thanatology must come to terms with our mortality, even when defending immortality, and therefore it is worthwhile to inquire into this phenomenon from a wide variety of philosophical-anthropological perspectives. One of the messages of this paper is that, for us mortals, none of these perspectives can ultimately be disentangled from ethical reflection, and more generally normative reflection. Therefore, we must in the end philosophically pursue not only our own mortal life (and within it, possibly, our own immortality) but also that of all the others we recognize as humans. Then, eventually, the issue turns into one about *recognition*: whom should we recognize as our fellow humans, and on what kind of grounds? Again, it seems, this issue is not decidable in the absence of ethical orientation, which already presupposes orienting toward others as mortals (whether or not one actually believes in their, or one's own, immortality). Normative questions regarding the grounds for recognizing others as our fellow humans, as persons belonging to a group of "us", cannot be avoided. Moreover, this notion of "us" can in the end be only normatively characterized; no mere factual boundary between "us" and "them" can be satisfying here.

Accordingly, *pace* the currently received analytic paradigm in philosophical thanatology, which sets metaphysical issues first and sees ethical issues as subordinate to them (cf., e.g., Fischer 1993), we should now be able to see that philosophical thanatology, as well as philosophical anthropology more generally, provides ample evidence of the inseparable intertwining of ethics and metaphysics.

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