

## Reflections on the Nature of Death

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**Vadim M Rozin\***

*Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Chief Researcher, Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 12, Goncharnaya st., bldg. 1, Moscow, 109240, Russian Federation*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Vadim M Rozin, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Chief Researcher, Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 12, Goncharnaya st., bldg. 1, Moscow, 109240, Russian Federation.

The essence of death, in my opinion, is twofold and ambivalent: it is both a biological phenomenon conditioned by the finiteness of human life, and a social (socio-cultural) one, within the framework of the reality of which a person often thinks of himself as a timeless, immortal being. Such duality entails not only contradictions and cognitive dissonance, but also difficult problems and experiences.

There are an almost infinite number of solutions to the problem of death, however, several polar approaches can be identified. One of the most common is to become immortal, with this began human life and the very first, "archaic" culture (after all, the idea of an archaic soul, which lay at the foundation of this culture, can be understood as the first rehearsal of the concept of immortality), and trans-humanists insist on the same idea of eternal life, but already based on ultra-modern technologies, on the threshold of the next culture ("future culture").

Another, one might say, alternative approach is to agree with the finiteness of human life, but to rethink death in such a way that it seems to disappear and ceases to frighten a person. Plato, in particular, combines both approaches, on the one hand, asserting the immortality of the soul, and on the other hand, saying that if we live correctly and meaningfully, then, although we will die, having completed the next cycle of existence on earth, we will not be afraid of death and will become "blessed". In this second approach, the solution to the problem of death is seen precisely in the right life, one of the consequences of which is the reduction of the fear of death or its complete disappearance.

The third approach is the recognition of the impossibility of avoiding both death and worries about it, but the way out is seen in a deep understanding of these phenomena themselves. As Marina Tsvetaeva once said, "to truly understand is to accept".

Our reflection on death should begin with the condition of its conceivability. Perhaps an enlightened reader will be surprised and say, what is so difficult about it. For a believer, death is a temporary otherness, and then God will resurrect him, and he will live forever. And for an atheist, death means the cessation of biological existence and, consequently, complete disappearance. Well, there are also esotericists, about which the author himself wrote [1] a lot. For them, according to his research, there is no death either, because, having reached true reality, they live forever, but not with God, but in a special world. For example, like the Buddha. When the disciples asked Gautama if there is death, he answered something like this: did I tell you that I would answer this question, no, I teach about such

a world, Nirvana, where there is neither one nor the other, where all forms and sufferings cease [2].

But has not interest in what death is revived? On the one hand, because our civilization is going through a deep crisis and more and more often even scientists, not to mention philosophers and astrologers, predict its death, either from a nuclear catastrophe, or from a huge asteroid that accidentally flew into our solar system, or from some other cosmic catastrophe, and even simply from people's own delusions. Just one example.

"Humanity," writes the famous Russian philosopher Vladimir Kutyrev, "is threatened with catastrophe not only in the form of a war unleashed by itself armed with technological achievements, which will still be a private event, but also as a process of loss of the human in it, its diminishment to the point of disappearance... Not into emptiness (it does not exist), but into Otherness. Like emptiness for us. Forward, faster, further and to the death of <... >And the first to die will be the one who runs faster. With bitter pity it remains to say: Blinded by technical light, progressively stupid, unhappy humanity" [3].

On the other hand, this interest is fueled not by the play of random, uncontrollable forces, but by seemingly completely controllable scientific and technological progress. Again, like a phoenix, the concepts of immortality have been revived from the ashes, but on the basis of modern achievements of science and technology. One of these concepts is transhumanism (posthuman). It is known that one of the main ideologists of modern transhumanism is the English philosopher and futurologist Max O'Connor (pseudonym Max More). In particular, he writes that "when technology allows us to overcome ourselves psychologically, genetically, and neurologically, we who have become transhumans will be able to transform ourselves into posthumans—beings of unprecedented physical, intellectual, and psychological abilities, self-programming, potentially immortal, unconstrained individuals" (quoted in E. Davis) [4].

Finally, there is also a constantly operating reason, at least since the modern era, namely, the difficulty in comprehending death by almost every person. By virtue of rational consciousness, conditioned by the scientific picture of the world, modern man lives as if he were God. And we are talking not only about atheists, but also about believers, because the latter also live in the world of technogenic civilization and enjoy its fruits. What God is and where he dwells, the majority of believers, already as people brought up by a modern school focused on the development of science and technology, can imagine with great difficulty or cannot at all; God is thought of by them purely conditionally as a certain transcendental being of indefinite appearance, possessing no less indefinite possibilities. Can He, for example, violate the laws of nature, and if not, what is His power?

Although formally modern man recognizes the finiteness of his being, in fact he lives as an immortal being, not preparing for death and not wishing to think about it. How often, dying, a person realizes with horror that he is completely unprepared for death (although, hand on heart, we confess, who is ready for it, where are those righteous people?). Again, at this point, some reader may say that the author is an old man, so he is worried about death, but the reader, they say, is younger and it is too early for him to think about death. But as experience shows, for some reason, most of these opponents do not want to think about death until the very last hour of their lives.

The situation indicated here, if we look at it from the point of view of the history of mankind, is relatively new, let's say, of the last centuries. Although the problem of the fear of death and the search for overcoming it arose in the culture of the "Ancient Kingdoms" (Ancient Egypt, Sumer, India, China, the kingdom of the Nagua peoples (the Aztec Empire), etc.). In the preceding very first, "archaic culture", people were not very afraid of death, since they believed in souls and spirits (it is not for nothing that this culture is also called "animistic"), here death was understood as the irreversible departure of the soul from the body and eternal life in the land of the dead, where hunting and everything else were the same as when living in their native tribe, or even better.

However, in the culture of the Ancient Kingdoms, souls, passing to the other world, under the protection of the gods of death, on the contrary, lost everything and lived only with the memories of the former life that was no longer attainable. For example, here are the thoughts and experiences of the teachers of the Nagua people (the ancient Indians of America who inhabited the Great Valley of Mexico).

I cry, I feel in despair:  
I remember that we must leave the beautiful  
flowers and songs.  
Then let us enjoy and sing,  
Once we leave forever and perish.  
Let not those who live in wickedness come;  
The earth is very wide.  
Oh, if only I could always live,  
if I had never died! [5]

Nevertheless, a person finds a solution. It contained two remarkable inventions. The first, which belonged to the archaic culture, was the idea of the human soul, which is not only the bearer of life (it was believed that he who had a soul is alive), but also never dies, probably archaic man simply could not imagine his complete disappearance from the face of the earth. The second invention, which developed only in the culture of the Old Kingdoms, related to the life of an individual: this life in the other, afterlife was also good (prosperous), but only if this name lived correctly in this earthly vale (as, for example, it is written in the Egyptian Book of the Dead “did not eat sacrificial food”, “revered the gods”, “carefully offered sacrifices to them”, “fulfilled the will of the gods”, etc.).

As I show in my book *Introduction to Schemaology*, the idea of the human soul and of the right life as a condition for a prosperous life in the afterlife was represented by schemas. They were also invented to solve the problem of death and a number of others, for example, to explain the phenomena of illness and dreams, the meaning of ancient works of art, and the maintenance of power (for example, that everyone strictly follow the prescriptions of priests and kings) [6]. The other two functions of the schema are the setting of a new reality and vision, as well as the conditions for a new action. For example, the scheme of the soul set the following reality: if the soul left the body permanently, then it was death, if it was temporarily an illness, if during sleep it was a dream, the creation of works of art, it was the summoning of souls, souls could pass from one body to another – reincarnation, sacrifices could be made to them, then they helped a person, and so on. In accordance with this understanding, actions were also carried out: if, for example, a person died (i.e. his soul was left without a house-body), then his family or tribe created a new dwelling for the departed soul (the grave is a permanent house, itterma among the Khanty and Mansi, \u2012 temporary).

No matter how the idea of the soul changed, its scheme continued to fulfill its original purpose, namely, it made it possible to believe that a person could live forever. Here are two interesting cases: what is the soul according to Plato and the medieval Christian understanding of the soul. In the *Republic*, Plato describes the vicissitudes of souls in the afterlife. Although the further fate of man in a new incarnation (set by lots offered by the gods) is interpreted by Plato as dependent on the choice and personality of the deceased, nevertheless, it is still the archaic soul familiar to us, which ensures eternal life [7]. Plato’s soul combined two, in fact, incompatible properties: it is both the source of eternal life and the personality, whose life was thought to be finite.

We see the same two principles in the Christian soul: it is immortal, since God must resurrect it at the Last Judgment, and it is finite as the soul of a medieval personality. Here is a small fragment of the “Oration Against the Hellenes” by Justin’s disciple, Tatian the Assyrian (112-185), in which he explains as a person why he believes in God, and at the same time, why, like archaic man, he thinks, that will live forever. “Wherefore we believe that at the end of all things there will be a Resurrection of bodies, not as the Stoics teach, according to whom, after certain periods of time, the same beings always appear and perish without any benefit, but once, after the fulfillment of our ages, and solely for the sake of restoring some men to judgment. Let fire destroy my body, but the world will receive this substance, dispersed like vapor; let me perish in the rivers or the seas, let me be torn to pieces by wild beasts, but I will hide myself in the treasury of the rich Lord. A weak and godless man does not know what is hidden; and the King God, when He wills, will restore to its former state the essence which is visible to Him alone” [8].

They believe that in the “real world”, where a person can in principle go, there is no death at all (another thing is that for this he must perform a real feat and a miracle – radically remake himself). For example, the esoterically minded Christian of the XVIII century

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 \u2013 1772) in his spiritual writings states that every person is originally an immortal spirit. What people call death is really just a spiritual transformation: people who love good, according to Swedenborg, become angels and go to heaven, and those who gravitate towards evil turn into demons and descend into hell. The [9] famous esotericist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) paints a different picture. In addition to our world, where egoism and chaos reign, there is a spiritual world, where the esotericist goes. as well as to help those living in this world in creativity). In the spiritual world, such a being participates in the development of the Earth and prepares his new incarnation in order to return to earth in the ordinary world. And such a cycle can last forever [10].

In modern times, as is known, criticism of both religious and esoteric ideas unfolds. Here, for example, is what Immanuel Kant writes about the teaching of Swedenborg. "Therefore, I will not in the least condemn the reader if, instead of considering the spirit-workers to be half belonging to the other world, he immediately writes them down as candidates for treatment in the hospital and thus saves himself from any further investigation of <... > in Swedenborg's work I find the same fanciful play of imagination that many other amateurs have found in the play of nature, when in the outlines of dappled marble he pictured a holy family, or in stalactite formations - monks, fonts and church organs<... > I'm tired of quoting the wild ravings of the worst of all science fiction writers, or continuing them to the point of describing to him the state after the death of <... > it would be in vain to try to hide the fruitlessness of all this work - it catches the eye of everyone<... > The human mind is not endowed with such wings that would enable it to break through the high clouds that hide from our eyes the secrets of the other world. Inquisitive people who are so anxious to learn something about the world can be given a simple but natural advice: wait patiently until you get there" [11].

In his work "On the Soul" he not only rejects the archaic understanding of the soul, but also shows that the faculties of sensation, imagination and thinking can be described and explained without the introduction and positing of such a reality. psychology, the concepts of which we all now widely use [12]. At the same time, which was not at all planned, the man of the new time again found himself in the grip of the fear of death, since such a support in eternal life as the idea of the soul was knocked out of him.

How can this problem be solved again for those people who for some reason do not believe in God or cannot follow the esoteric path? It is clear that there are not even millions of such people on earth, but a couple of billion, if not more. It is easy to notice that here the author is stepping on slippery and thin ice, but, as the people say, "if you call yourself a gruzdem, climb into the back." What considerations can be relied on in solving this problem?

It can be noted (the first point) that the point is not what the Underworld really is, or whether it exists at all. Cultural-historical reconstruction shows that, firstly, this world is understood differently in different historical epochs and in different cultures, and secondly, it is constructive, in the sense that the corresponding explanatory schemes are invented by a person who solves the above-mentioned existential problems. At the same time, if a person manages to resolve the fear of death on the basis of such schemes, then the problem is solved. This point was noted by Plato, who said in his "Post-Law" that since he followed his idea of a right life, now in his declining years he is not afraid of death and even feels blessed.

The second point is due to the nature of life after death. If the afterlife is posited, given with the help of schemas, but it is further perceived naturalistically, i.e. as an immediate reality (as what really is, this is how the Christian God, for example, has always been perceived), then there are probably two phases here. Initially, the afterlife appears to a person in the form of a story, narration (in schemes); Only with time, when a person gets used to a new reality (as methodologists say: puts on the appropriate schemes), becomes convinced that, having believed in new narratives, he ceases to be afraid of death, the afterlife acquires the features of immediate reality.

The third point. Again, cultural and historical reconstruction allows us to assert that over time there is a shift: the solution to the problem is increasingly reduced to building a proper life and, accordingly, less burden falls on the description of the afterlife itself. At present, this description is very poor and conditional. The question even arises: is it possible to do without this very afterlife reality at all, or is it fundamentally impossible, since in this case there will be no need to build the most correct life?

The fourth point is quite obvious. Overcoming the fear of death in modern culture should be solved taking into account the fact that modern man has rational thinking, is introduced to modern science and technology, and, as a result, perceives and understands the world within the framework of scientific and technical rationality.

Now, as I see the solution to the problem. First of all, it is necessary to clear the bridgehead of human consciousness for the offensive. For now, he is busy with myths: that our life can be extended into the future, that on the basis of the achievements of modern science and technology, a person can become immortal (no matter in what form), that the main thing is to replace our mortal and imperfect body with a more functional and periodically replaceable effective android and network device, that a person is primarily a biological creature (organism). All of the above are myths and memes.

Man is not only a biological organism. He is a multidimensional centaur: in addition to biological laws, his life is determined by social, cultural, semiotic, technical, and spiritual factors. Moreover, the whole is not one here, depending on external and internal situations, it can change. For example, at this moment, dear reader, the whole of your life is set not by your biological desires, but by reading this text and thinking that you are forced to carry out. And if you are a believer and go to church for the Liturgy, then the whole will be set by your spiritual personality. When you sleep or are sick, biology and corporeality come into their own, and even then, not like animals, but conditioned by culture and social relations.

A person, even recreated with the help of technology, would not be able to live in the future, remaining the same person. Is it possible, for example, by replacing his body, to preserve his psyche or spirituality, not to mention his personality?

If a person is a person, i.e. a creature rooted in culture, among the people of his time, then how, one asks, will he be able to live in the future among completely different people and in a different culture?

I will not multiply rhetorical questions. I think it is clear what I want to say. Man is a fundamentally finite being, and not only by virtue of his biology, but no less in terms of social, cultural, psychic and spiritual nature. Eternal life is fundamentally impossible, and if it existed, it would be terrible, perhaps worse than death.

So, one area of work is the criticism of myths. Another is switching to building the right life. First, such a life should leave no room for life after death. It is necessary to form such a consciousness in oneself that the afterlife is simply impossible to conceive; just as at the present time it is impossible for a believer to conceive of life without God (perhaps he sometimes wanted to, but it does not work out). I recall one incident described by N. Berdyaev in "Self-Knowledge":

"Akimushka once told me about an extraordinary event that happened to him when he was a boy. He was a shepherd and tended the flock. And suddenly the thought occurred to him that there was no God. Then the sun began to fade, and he was plunged into darkness. He felt that if there is no God, then there is nothing, there is only perfect nothingness and darkness. It was as if he had gone completely blind. Then, in the depths of nothing and darkness, a light suddenly began to light up, he again believed that there was a God, "nothing" turned into a world brightly illuminated by the sun, everything was restored in a new light [13].

So, if we critically think through the streams of contradictory information that fall on us, selecting only what stands up to criticism, in general, think well, then it will be simply impossible to imagine the continuation of our life after death. We will also lose vision, of course, not visual, but mental; Not only will our "third eye" not open, we will lose the other two.

Secondly, a right life is a life that a person consciously builds. This is a life in which he can fully realize himself, can minimize his illnesses, cope with problems, and contribute to the development of society and culture (since a person is not only a biological being, but also a social and cultural one).

I suppose that here the reader can stop me with a counterexample, pointing to old age, where it seems impossible not to think about death and it is very difficult to realize oneself. I do not object – it is necessary to think about death, this is one of the conditions for overcoming the fear of it. But, as I wrote in the article about old age, death is not included in old age, it is included in the concept of old

age, which can be built by every person. If he wants to live normally, and not only suffer and worry [14]. In such a concept, he can also come to an important idea that he is not indifferent to how a person lives and what will happen to his relatives and other people in the future, as well as to the idea that he himself is making a contribution to this future. That every person, if only he lives correctly, will continue to live in his children and loved ones, and that the quality of his life creates the quality of life of Humanity.

The ideal scenario for the end of life is as follows: a person as a person has fully realized himself, and his health has approached the zero line, i.e. he has exhausted his vital forces, and if he has not been ill before or has been minimally ill, then in the future he will suffer seriously. Nothing in the life of such a person holds, he can calmly wait for death, which, fortunately, And it comes. It seems that close to this scenario, a 104-year-old Australian scientist, Professor David Goodall, has just ended his life. On the one hand, he fully realized his life program, having done a lot of useful things in life and achieved fame in science, on the other hand, he did not wait for his life to become unbearable due to illness and infirmity. This is probably why he voluntarily passed away in Switzerland on May 10 (in the Life Circle clinic to the music of Beethoven, he accepted euthanasia; to fulfill his last wish, the oldest scientist in Australia flew to another continent) [15].

But the ideal scenario is not so common in life, so it should be discussed as an ideal and a plan. But doesn't the solution of similar problems always begin in culture with utopian ideas? Many of them, indeed, turn out to be unrealizable and sink into oblivion (and even then, sometimes in a new situation and culture, they are revived). But others, for whom it is possible to find a solution that satisfies many, begin to live, first in the form of semiotic and virtual, and then as a new reality of life. And if a person can get used to this new reality, believe in it, it will take possession of him sooner or later. It is possible that the course of events considered here will someday be perceived as a natural version of the right life and its end.

However, in addition to individual death, the death of all mankind is also conceivable: the earth will collide with another celestial body, or lose its magnetic field, or this field will be destroyed by a supernova explosion, or the earth will die as a result of the natural evolution of the universe. Unfortunately, we have to agree with Hannah Arendt, who writes that "our plans now are no more than to explore the immediate surrounding part of the universe, the infinitesimal region that humanity alone can reach, moving at the speed of light. Given the length of human life – the only absolute limit left at the moment – it is very unlikely that we will ever get much further" [16].

And what will happen if our Sun exhausts its energy, and at the same time we cannot move to another planet? Alexander Bogdanov in his novel "Engineer Manny" (1912), again in the spirit of mythological discourse, offers the solution of this vital catastrophe as the heroic suicide of our civilization.

"A huge high hall, flooded with light, thousands of people. But are they people? How free their postures are, how calm and clear their faces are, how strong their bodies breathe. And these are doomed?."

What has brought them here? What thought, what feeling has united them in this general silence?. A new face enters and rises to a dais at the back of the room. Evidently he is the one they have been waiting for: everyone's eyes are fixed on him. Is this Natty? (Manny's son, who continues his work. \u2012 V.R.). Yes, Natty, but another, like a deity, in a halo of superhuman beauty. In the solemn and deep silence he says:

"Brethren, in the name of those who have taken upon themselves the latter task, I proclaim that we have done our work. You know that the fate of our world was fully clarified many thousands of years ago. The weakened sun has long been unable to nourish with its rays the development of our life, our great common work. We kept the solar flame burning as long as possible. We blew up and brought down on the sun all our planets in turn, except one, on which we are now. The energy of these collisions gave us an extra hundred thousand years. We spent most of them researching ways to move to other solar worlds. Here we were a complete failure...

We have indisputable evidence that intelligent beings live in other star systems as well. On this we built our new plan...

The cold and emptiness of etheric spaces, which are fatal to life, are powerless against dead matter. It can be entrusted with images and symbols that express the meaning and content of our history, our work, all the struggles and victories of our world. Thrown with sufficient force, it will passively and obediently carry our dear idea, our last will, to immeasurable distances...

From the strongest substance that nature could give us, we have prepared millions of gigantic projectiles: each is a faithful copy of our will. They are composed of thin rolled-up plates, covered with artistic representations and simple signs, which can be easily deciphered by any rational being. These projectiles are laid at precisely defined places on our planet, and for each the direction and velocity that he will receive from the initial shock are calculated. The calculations are rigorous and tested hundreds of times: the goal will inevitably be achieved.

And the initial push, brethren, will come in a few minutes. Within our planet we have collected an enormous mass of that unstable matter, the atoms of which, exploding, are destroyed in an instant, and give rise to the most powerful of all elemental forces. In a few minutes, our planet will cease to exist and its fragments will scatter into infinite space, carrying away our dead bodies and our living work.

Let us greet joyfully, brethren, this moment in which the greatness of death will merge with the greatest act of creation, this moment that will complete our life in order to transmit its soul to our unknown brothers!" ...

And when the vision was swallowed up by a hurricane of light and fire, the last thing that drowned in it was the same thought in Manny's mind: 'Unknown brothers!' [17].

The striking discourse is mythological, but it uses modern astrophysical considerations. If scientific thinking does not work, shouldn't we then return to the religious, as our famous philosopher A.F. Losev did?

"This," Losev said, explaining to Vladimir Bibikhin why he was a believer, "amazed me. And so I lived my life and could not and cannot understand... God is the creator, the Almighty, and what is going on here? Could he not remove all this disgrace with a flick of his little finger? Can. Why doesn't he want to? Mystery... And the believer is the one who has seen this mystery. Others say, "Oh, there is no God." This is rationalism, and foolishness... And faith begins when God is crucified. God is crucified! When you begin to try to understand this, you see: this is a mystery. Both the ancient and the new, of course, knew this secret. Aristotle is naïve: in one place of the *Metaphysics* he says this, in another another. In both cases, everything is correct. But if you say: how is it so, there you have an absolute mind, the prime mover, which controls everything, and here the devil knows what is going on?.. And if there were a believer, he would say: this is a mystery. Therefore, I did not want to make an absolute out of the "Metaphysics"...

That is why, in expounding a tedious, boring metaphysics that claims to be absolute (a strong, divine structure of the world), I believe that all relativity is also embedded here. The sky, of course, moves for centuries. This god, at least the lower one, but even this god moves with the entire movement of the firmament. \u2012 But if in one second it turns out that this vault does not exist, some one moment, and this entire firmament falls out, exploded, broke, disappeared – I wouldn't be surprised. Because I am a believer. And if I were a pagan, then yes, of course, I would say, there is chaos here on earth, but the fixed stars are all moving constantly, eternally, unchangeably, etc. From the Christian point of view, this is relative, but paganism is the absolutization of the whole world. Well, let Plato and Aristotle believe that this device is indestructible, let them believe. But if a catastrophe suddenly happens, then they do not know where to go \u2012 but I will say: the mystery of God has been accomplished; This is how it should be" [18].

Losev thought in this vein, and readers, I am sure, will think about death in their own way. This is their right.

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