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## Beyond the Grave: Belief, Knowledge, and the Conceptualization of Death in Philosophical Thanatology

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate relationship between belief, knowledge, and concepts in the context of death, situating itself within the domain of Philosophical Thanatology. By examining how temporal perspectives, intuition, imagination, and language shape our understanding of mortality, the research delves into the epistemological, ontological, and psychological dimensions of death-related beliefs. The study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, drawing on philosophical analysis, literary criticism, and cultural studies to investigate the formation, expression, and evolution of beliefs about death. Key themes include the temporality of belief, the role of non-rational faculties in belief formation, and the interplay between language and conceptualization. Through a close reading of philosophical texts, literary works, and cultural narratives, the research highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of human engagement with mortality. The findings underscore the centrality of belief in shaping existential attitudes and behaviors, offering new insights into the philosophical and cultural significance of death.

Keywords: Belief; Knowledge; Philosophical Thanatology; Death and Temporality.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Human cognition and perception are fundamentally shaped by three interrelated elements: knowledge, concepts, and beliefs (Linson, et al., 2018). These elements form the basis of how individuals see, feel, understand, and articulate their experiences. However, the relationship between belief, knowledge, and concept remains complex and often elusive. Contemporary philosophers of mind argue that the term *belief* does not necessarily require reflective thought; rather, it can simply denote an attitude toward a proposition regarded as true. In this sense, belief is often understood as a *propositional attitude* (Heil, 2019). For example, consider the statement: "Death is a phase in life and not the end of life." This assertion reflects a mental state that conveys a specific attitude or stance, where the proposition is held to be true. Such a statement may be grounded in beliefs or concepts such as the "afterlife," "immortality," or the continuity of memory, regardless of the proposition's truth value.

The primary objective of this paper is to explore the intricate relationship between *belief* and *concept*, with a specific focus on the concept and belief surrounding *death*. By analyzing belief-statements and the interplay between belief and knowledge, this study aims to shed light on how these cognitive constructs shape our understanding of mortality.

## **UNDERSTANDING "CONCEPT"**

What is a concept? This question has been approached from diverse philosophical perspectives, yet a consensus on its precise ontological nature remains elusive. Analytic philosophers, such as Gottlob Frege, have examined the idea of *concept* through the lens of language, while others have explored it from metaphysical, ontological, empirical, or epistemic viewpoints. Despite these varied approaches, the definition of *concept* continues to be a subject of debate.

One of the most recent attempts to define *concept* emphasizes its foundational role in human cognition. As Corcho and Gómez-Pérez (2000) explain:

Concepts, also known as classes, are used in a broad sense. They can be abstract or concrete, elementary or composite, real or fictitious. In short, a concept can be anything about which something is said, and, therefore, could also be the description of a task, function, action, strategy, reasoning process, etc (p. 85).

This definition highlights the versatility of concepts, which can encompass both tangible and abstract entities, as well as processes and ideas. Barry Smith (2005), in his work *Beyond Concepts: Ontology as Reality Representation*, notes a similar tendency in linguistics to conflate concepts and entities. He cites Ronald Langacker's *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, which states:

We are capable of constructing conceptual worlds of arbitrary complexity involving entities and phenomena that have no direct counterpart in peripherally connected experience. Such are the worlds of dreams, stories, mythology, mathematics, predictions about the future, flights of the imagination, and linguistic theories. All of us have constructed many conceptual worlds that differ in genre, complexity, conventionality, abstractness, degree of enchantment, and so on. For many linguistic purposes, all of these worlds are on a par with the one we distinguish as "reality" (Langacker, 1987, p. 98).

This passage underscores the human capacity to create and navigate multiple conceptual frameworks, each with its own internal logic and coherence. Whether rooted in empirical reality or abstract imagination, concepts serve as the building blocks of human thought and communication.

## **"CONCEPTS" FROM THE ANALYTIC AND ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Consider the statement, "Death is an end." The phrase "is a" plays a crucial role in asserting the relationship between the concept and the object, and this assertion is fundamentally about meaning. When someone utters the statement "death is an end," they are not only expressing a proposition about death being an end in itself but also invoking the concept of "end" through the predicate "is an end." According to Gottlob Frege (1892), a concept is defined as the reference of a predicate. A sentence, in Frege's framework, is divided into three parts: the subject, the predicate; it can only be the reference of the subject. Returning to the statement "Death is an end," "death" is the object, "is an end" is the predicate, and "end" is the subject. Here, the subject ("end"), which is also the concept in the statement, serves as the reference. The word "is" in the

statement functions as an assertion about the meaning of the name "death" in relation to the subject "end." Importantly, in sentences like "death is an end," the subject and object (i.e., "death" and "end") are intricately intertwined in a relationship where both the object and the concept are indispensable to each other in terms of meaning.

The "is a" relation becomes particularly meaningful when examined from an ontological perspective. Ontology assigns a sense of "universals" to the "is a" relation between concept and object (Norton, 1976). For instance, in sentences like "a human being is a mammal" or "a car is a vehicle," humans and cars are instances of the universals "mammal" and "vehicle," respectively. Universals represent what these instances have in common, and thus, universals and instances share a symbiotic relationship that conforms to time and space. However, the "is a" assertion becomes more complex when dealing with "non-particular" universals and instances, such as in the statements "a human being is a person" or "death is not the end of the soul." In these cases, the entities involved—human being, person, death, and soul—are non-particular universals, making it difficult to establish a clear or symbiotic relationship between the subject and the object. The ontological and metaphysical frameworks of entities like "person" and "death" often do not align with the "realities" of space and time, where "realities" refer to the finite experiences of the human world. This raises critical questions: Are concepts like "person" and "death" confined to the finiteness of human life, or do they conform to the Platonic idea of "Form"? Furthermore, can we perceive or conceive of a reality that exists independently of our relationship with it?

A seemingly simple statement like "a human being is a person" can become highly complex when analyzed through the lenses of the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind. The predicate "is a person" raises numerous questions about the concept of "personhood." Is there a single, universal concept of being a "person," or are there multiple, subjective concepts of "person" that vary across individuals? Is the concept of being a "person" a mental construct, or does it exist independently of the mind? What distinguishes the concept of "person" from other concepts like "nonperson"? Beyond these metaphysical issues, concepts also face epistemological challenges. The primary epistemological problem concerns how concepts are grasped or understood. Generally, the understanding or possession of a concept is tied to certain beliefs about the thing in question. This leads to further questions: Is there a specific way to grasp a concept, or are there multiple ways to possess it? Additionally, humans possess the ability to categorize and differentiate entities based on shared characteristics. For example, one can categorize fruits like oranges, bananas, and guavas as distinct from vegetables like cauliflower and cabbage. Similarly, the concept of "person" can be differentiated into human persons and non-persons based on the qualities associated with each. This ability to categorize and differentiate seems essential to possessing a concept. Thus, the central question arises: What is the relationship between the ability to categorize and differentiate, the possession of a concept, and the nature of the concept itself?

There are various theories related to the concept of "concept" and how concepts are possessed, and it is important to examine a few of these as they are relevant to understanding our relationship with concepts like "death" and "personhood." The metaphysical theory posits that concepts are universal, meaning a single concept can be understood by different people simultaneously. For example, the word for "hen" in English, French ("poule"), and German ("henne") refers to the same concept despite linguistic differences. Within metaphysical theory, there are several viewpoints: realism, nominalism, and Platonism. Realism holds that concepts are distinct from their instances, while nominalism argues that concepts are identical to their instances. Platonism (or anti-realism) theorizes that concepts ontologically precede their instances, meaning a concept exists even if its instance does not. For example, the concept of "hotness" exists independently of an instance like hot water. In contrast, conceptualism argues that concepts are mental entities dependent on thought for their existence.

Concepts also play a significant role in analytic philosophy, particularly in the philosophy of language. Analyzing concepts is a primary task of analytic philosophy, but such analysis must begin with an understanding of what "analysis" entails. Specifically, it is essential to establish the ontological status of the entity being analyzed before determining the path of analysis. For instance, analyzing the concept of "human" requires clarifying the aspects that define what it means to be human. This type of analysis often relies on a metaphysical satisfaction condition, where the concept is applied to a set of conditions across all possible circumstances, known as a "possible-worlds extension." Thus, based on the metaphysical satisfaction condition, it can be argued that concepts have a logical constitution.

However, not all concepts can be analyzed through logical constitution. Empiricists like Hume and Locke argued that certain concepts, such as good, bad, fairness, justice, and faith, are derived directly from sensations and cannot be logically analyzed (Dănişor, 2024). These "primitive concepts" appeal directly to our senses. However, non-empiricists contend that notions like justice, goodness, and truth are logically constituted and can be analyzed. Regardless of these debates, it is clear that concepts are complex entities, whether viewed from a metaphysical or empirical perspective. Platonism, which posits that concepts exist independently of the mind, adds another layer of complexity. The ontological nature of concepts raises further questions about how knowledge is gathered, beliefs are formed, and justifications are made. For example, one cannot understand the concept of "murder" (defined as the unlawful and premeditated killing of a person) without prior knowledge of what constitutes such an act.

The ontological conflict surrounding concepts can be illustrated through the example of "murder." Consider the question: Is killing a human being equivalent to killing an animal? The category of "animal" introduces ambiguity—is the animal an endangered species, a common animal, or something else? Additionally, the phrase "killing unlawfully and with premeditation" adds complexity, as killing can occur in various contexts, such as self-defense, defense of others, or patriotism. The purpose of the act determines its categorization as murder, self-defense, or an act of bravery. This raises further questions: Is killing a human being the same as killing an insect? Is killing an earthworm the same as killing a mosquito? Under what circumstances can the word "killing" be replaced with "murder"? While both words involve the act of taking life, they are not interchangeable, as "murder" carries specific legal and moral implications.

These questions highlight the ethical and moral dimensions inherent in the concept of "murder." Understanding this concept requires grappling with moral and ethical obligations, utilitarian considerations, legal frameworks, and even biological hierarchies. For instance, the concept of "murder" is entangled in the hierarchy of the food chain, with humans at the top, followed by endangered species, common animals, and insects like mosquitoes at the bottom. The act of killing a mosquito, for example, is rarely considered morally or legally significant, given its utilitarian value and the threats it poses. Thus, applying the concept of "murder" to a "possible-worlds extension" reveals that understanding the concept requires knowledge of its constituent aspects, including moral, ethical, legal, and linguistic nuances. This underscores the role of language in shaping our thoughts and attitudes toward concepts like "murder."

#### CONCEPT AND KNOWLEDGE

Is there a possible relationship between "concept" and "knowledge"? Are they similar, or do they differ fundamentally? The classical theory of concepts posits that concepts have

logical constitutions. However, empiricists and Platonists challenge this view. Empiricists argue that not all concepts can be logically constituted; concepts like "good," "bad," and "justice" are perceived through sense-impressions rather than logical analysis. Platonists, on the other hand, assert that concepts are "pure forms" that exist independently of both the inner world (the mind) and the outer world (reality). For Platonists, a concept is not tied to a bearer or perceiver; it is an abstract entity that transcends individual understanding. Similarly, "knowledge" is also considered a "pure form," but it is characterized by reasoning, rationality, and analysis.

There is a clear distinction between the phrases "I know..." and "I have the concept of...." This difference is evident in their usage in language. The phrase "I have the concept of..." implies an understanding or possession of the concept, whereas "I know..." does not necessarily require understanding. One can know something without fully grasping it. For example, a person might know the definition of a term without comprehending its deeper implications. In contrast, a concept must be understood and internalized to discern its metaphysical foundations. Thus, while knowledge can exist as a "pure form" (as Platonists suggest), a concept depends on being perceived, understood, and possessed. Without this process, a concept remains at a level that does not require senseimpressions or mental engagement for its existence.

To illustrate this, consider the proposition: "I know everything that is possible to be known about 'death." This includes its linguistic meaning, the physical implications for the deceased, the psychological impact on the living, and its medical and legal significance. However, when encountering Nietzsche's statement, "God is dead," one might struggle to reconcile this with their existing knowledge of death. Nietzsche's concept of death, tied to existentialism and nihilism, cannot be fully understood through mere factual knowledge about death. This suggests that knowledge of something does not necessarily equate to the possession of its concept. This distinction becomes particularly evident in language. For instance, the word "dead" carries different meanings in the statements "God is dead," "Alexander is dead," and "A person can never be dead." Each statement imbues "dead" with unique significance, demonstrating that mere knowledge of the word's definition is insufficient for possessing its concept. Knowing a concept does not automatically enable its "possible-worlds extension" to explore its metaphysical and ontological dimensions. For example, one might know the chemical formula and physical appearance of water but fail to identify water in a glass of juice. Thus, a concept requires understanding and internalization to form an idea or belief, whereas knowledge exists independently of these processes.

## **"BELIEF" AND ITS RELATION WITH LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE**

The concept of "belief" is inherently complex and multifaceted. It is typically approached from two primary perspectives: as an *occurrence* and as a *disposition* (Manosuthi, et al., 2024). According to H. H. Price (1969), the traditional view treats "believing" as a "special mental occurrence," focusing on the introspective analysis of this mental event. Price refers to this as the "Occurrence Analysis." In contrast, a more modern approach, emerging in the 20th century, treats belief as a *disposition* rather than a discrete mental act. For example, the statement "Helena believes in proposition x" can be analyzed as a dispositional statement, referring to Helena's likely actions, words, or feelings in specific circumstances. This shift from occurrence to disposition reflects a broader change in how belief is conceptualized in philosophy.

Traditional theorists, who view belief as a "special mental act," argue that believing is not an instantaneous acquisition but rather a process that develops over time, whether short or long (Hacker, 2024). For instance, the statement "I believe that a person can never die" differs significantly from "I like hip-hop." The former reflects a deeply ingrained system of belief developed over time, while the latter is a simple expression of personal preference with no bearing on one's belief system. Traditionalists also argue that the "act of believing" is a "mythical entity," akin to the "act of knowing." This raises the question: Can the statement "I believe that a person can never die" be understood dispositionally rather than solely through Occurrence Analysis? Suppose the believer falls asleep, changes their statement, or ceases to actively believe it. Even in such cases, they might continue to hold the belief unconsciously for an extended period, even if they rarely consciously affirm it. This suggests that belief can persist independently of active mental engagement.

Proponents of the Occurrence Analysis, however, argue that the Dispositional Analysis of belief is derivative in nature (McKitrick, 2018). In other words, the dispositional sense of "believe" is secondary to the mental occurrence of belief. Consider the statement "Philip believes that he can survive his death." According to traditionalists, Philip might hold this belief for a long time without actively thinking about it. However, when he does reflect on it, he experiences an "actual belief-occurrence" that he can introspectively recognize. From a Humean perspective, the proposition "...can survive his death" would evoke a strong and vivid feeling in Philip, potentially influencing his actions (Jones, 1943). For example, Philip might actively seek ways to achieve immortality. A less controversial example, such as "Philip believes that he can score better in mathematics," illustrates how the "actual belief-occurrence" might motivate Philip to practice more diligently and correct his mistakes. In both cases, belief plays a crucial role in shaping understanding and action, often transcending logical boundaries.

Beliefs, therefore, constitute a fundamental aspect of human cognition and behavior. They can persist independently of conscious thought, influence actions, and even defy logical reasoning. Whether analyzed as occurrences or dispositions, beliefs remain central to how individuals interpret and interact with the world.

#### FIRST-PERSON BELIEF STATEMENTS

What does the verb "to believe" signify when used in the first-person compared to the third-person? This question carries significant linguistic and philosophical implications. While the role of philosophy in addressing language-related questions remains debatable, this research thesis emphasizes the profound connection between language and belief systems, as well as the consequences arising from linguistic issues. H. H. Price (1969) notes that the first-person present tense statement "I believe that x" possesses unique characteristics not shared by other belief-sentences. For instance, the statement "I believe that death is a phase in life" often reflects a stance or position. When we say, "I believe that..." in the first-person, we implicitly invite others to accept our belief and assure them that they are justified in doing so. J. L. Austin (1962) described this firstperson present tense use of "to believe" as having a "performatory character." Thus, statements like "I believe/know that death is a phase in life" carry a guarantee-giving aspect. As Price writes in Belief: The Gifford Lectures, "It follows that in saying 'I know that p,' one is claiming to have conclusive evidence for the truth of the proposition p; otherwise, one would not be in a position to issue this 'hard' or 'cast iron' guarantee." In his chapter Deciding to Believe, Bernard Williams (1973) outlines five features of belief, emphasizing truth, assertion, and sincerity. He states:

1. **"Beliefs aim at truth"** (p. 137): Truth and falsehood are intrinsic dimensions of beliefs, distinguishing them from habits or other psychological dispositions. If a person believes something, that belief can be assessed as true or false based on its content. If the belief is found to be false, the person typically abandons it. Williams further clarifies, "To believe that so-and-so is one and the same as to believe that that thing is true: to believe that p is to believe that p is true" (p. 138).

2. **Self-paradox in first-person belief statements**: Williams highlights a unique problem with first-person present tense belief statements, which does not arise in third-person statements. For example, compare "I believe that I am immortal, but I am not" with "Helena believes that human beings are immortal, but it is not." The self-paradox is evident in the first statement but absent in the second.

While Williams' analysis of belief extends beyond language to epistemological considerations, the articulation of belief remains deeply tied to language. Our thoughts, whether sincere or insincere, are expressed through language, making it essential to examine the nature of the verb "to believe" in first-person utterances and its epistemological implications.

A first-person utterance carries a performatory character, where the speaker stands by their assertion. However, there is a critical difference between statements like "I know that the Taj Mahal was built by Shah Jahan" and "I believe that the Taj Mahal was built by Shah Jahan." The former conveys a strong guarantee of knowledge; if proven false, the speaker can be reproached, and even if true, the speaker may be challenged for lacking conclusive evidence. In contrast, the latter does not offer an ironclad guarantee. When one says, "I believe that the Taj Mahal was built by Shah Jahan," they are not necessarily providing conclusive evidence. Despite the tacit assurance embedded in such statements, the speaker can still be reproached if the evidence is too weak to justify the belief, as H. H. Price observes.

The performatory nature of first-person belief statements extends to private selfaddress. Consider Bernard Williams' observation that assertions can be insincere: what one utters outwardly may not align with their private beliefs. But what about internal assertions? Do first-person statements addressed to oneself retain the same performatory character? Price argues that assertions are always directed at someone, even in internal dialogue. In such cases, the belief or proposition is addressed to the "other" within oneself. Price suggests that individuals often experience internal conflict with this "other," and statements like "I believe that I can complete this task" are performatory because they reflect a stance taken toward this internal counterpart. However, the notion of a "conflictual self" or "dissociated personalities" leans more toward psychological explanations than philosophical ones. Regardless of whether the statement is addressed to others or oneself, introspection remains a fundamental human capacity, and the performatory nature of belief statements persists.

The linguistic significance of first-person and third-person belief statements lies in their expression of conviction. Beliefs are intimately tied to our thoughts and the level of conviction with which we hold them. When one utters a belief, the tone invariably conveys conviction, whether the statement is directed at oneself or others. However, Professor Gilbert Ryle offers a different perspective, emphasizing the absence of doubt rather than the presence of conviction. According to Ryle, first-person belief statements reflect a lack of doubt, underscoring the idea that "truth" exists independently of belief, disbelief, or knowledge. This distinction between doubt and conviction reveals much about an individual's attitude toward a proposition. For example, if one is absolutely certain that "human beings can survive death," despite knowing that life technically ends with death, their focus remains on the proposition itself rather than their mental attitude toward it. Conversely, a lack of conviction might manifest in statements like "I think human beings can survive death, but I am not sure."

It is important to note that analyzing belief solely through first-person statements is incomplete. As Bernard Williams points out, individuals may say things they do not believe or refrain from expressing their true beliefs. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of belief requires examining its epistemological and cognitive dimensions, including its relationship with knowledge and thought.

## **RELATION BETWEEN BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE**

All human inquiries are ultimately directed toward acquiring knowledge about a particular subject. But how do we achieve knowledge, or how do we come "to know" something? It is essential to recognize that "belief" plays a significant role in this process. However, "to know" is often contrasted with "to believe" in multiple ways. To understand the relationship between knowledge and belief, it is crucial to examine the differences between these two concepts. Bernard Williams (1973), in his analysis of belief, notes that "factual beliefs can be based on evidence." For instance, the belief that "it will rain" arises from observing dense clouds and knowing that such clouds typically lead to precipitation. Thus, factual knowledge often forms the basis of factual beliefs. However, in cases like "I believe that I can survive my death," knowledge plays a limited role. Here, belief becomes a substitute when knowledge cannot penetrate the unknown. Similarly, in statements like "I do not know if she can cook, but I believe that we will enjoy our dinner," belief steps in where knowledge is absent or uncertain. Despite this interplay, it is vital to analyze the distinctions between belief and knowledge to understand their relationship fully.

The most apparent difference between knowledge and belief lies in the contrast between "believe that" and "know that." Belief often dominates in situations where knowledge is unattainable. For example, the statement "I do not know if I can escape death, but I believe that I can survive my death" reflects this dominance. While the statement contains conflicting elements (e.g., "escape death" vs. "survive my death"), it illustrates how belief can persist even in the absence of empirical knowledge. Similarly, in more mundane contexts, such as "I do not know if he loves me, but I believe that he does not dislike me," belief often functions as a substitute for factual knowledge in intangible matters. In such cases, the empirical or intuitive side of human understanding overshadows the rational.

Another distinction arises in the context of "know how to" versus "believe how to." While one can "know how to" perform a task, such as driving a car, there is no equivalent "believe how to." For example, if someone forgets how to drive, they cannot "believe how to" drive; they can only recall or relearn the skill. A faint parallel might be having an idea about something, as in "I do not know how to drive a car, but I have an idea about its mechanism." However, this is not equivalent to belief.

Belief also encompasses the capacity to hold beliefs about things one does not fully understand and the ability to claim to believe something sincerely while not actually believing it. For instance, the statement "I believe that dead people should have rights" may seem contradictory or meaningless, yet a person can hold such a belief without fully comprehending its implications. Similarly, statements like "I believe that God exists" or "I believe that there are demons" highlight the limitations of knowledge and the expansive nature of belief. On the other hand, individuals can claim to believe something sincerely without actually holding that belief, much like claiming to know something without factual basis. For example, it was once reasonable to believe that smallpox was incurable until evidence proved otherwise. Similarly, a person might believe that the number thirteen is unlucky, and this belief might seem validated by personal experiences, but it remains an unreasonable assertion without factual grounding. Thus, the terms "right" or "correct" become paradoxical when applied to belief. It may be "right" for someone to believe a false proposition if the evidence supports it, yet "wrong" to believe a true proposition if the evidence is lacking. Therefore, the reasonability of a belief, rather than its correctness, should be the basis for evaluation.

Rationalists often argue that belief is inferior to knowledge, as belief lacks the rational or empirical foundation necessary to establish truth or falsity. However, belief remains integral to the fabric of human thought. H. H. Price (1969) suggests that belief exists on a spectrum ranging from suspicion to conviction, with knowledge representing the highest degree of belief-complete conviction. Yet, complete conviction does not necessarily equate to knowledge. For example, Helena might be convinced that her wallet was stolen, but she could be wrong. When someone is absolutely convinced of something, they often express it as "I know," as in "I know that my wallet was stolen." However, this "I know" is distinct from factual knowledge, as it is based on conviction rather than evidence. Linguistically, substituting a "to believe" proposition with a "to know" proposition reveals contradictions. For instance, "I am convinced that I have lost my wallet, but I may be mistaken" and "I know that I have lost my wallet, but I may be mistaken" are logically inconsistent. Such paradoxes arise only in first-person presenttense statements, as third-person statements like "Helena is convinced that she has lost her wallet, but she may be mistaken" do not carry the same absurdity. Thus, knowledge cannot be equated with the highest degree of belief, as conviction does not guarantee truth.

The question remains: What are knowledge and belief, and how are they related? Some philosophers have distinguished them as two distinct mental states, with knowledge being infallible and belief being fallible. However, contemporary philosophers, including H. H. Price (1969), argue that the difference is more akin to "success and failure" rather than separate states of mind. A person who knows something and is certain of it is not fundamentally different from someone who believes something with absolute conviction. The traditional definition of knowledge as infallible is tautological: if what one knows turns out to be false, it was never knowledge to begin with. This definition blurs the line between knowledge and belief.

Plato, in Theaetetus, defined knowledge as "correct belief with reason," emphasizing that correct belief alone does not constitute knowledge. For example, if a child believes they will become a swimmer and this belief is later validated, it does not qualify as knowledge unless supported by reasons. If the belief is based on an astrologer's prediction, it remains a belief rather than knowledge. Thus, for a belief to qualify as knowledge, it must be supported by conclusive reasons, held with full conviction, and ultimately be true. If any of these criteria are unmet, the belief does not amount to knowledge. Despite this framework, the question "how do you know?" remains central. Not all knowledge requires this question, as in statements like "my hand is paining" or "I am inside the library." Similarly, statements about past experiences do not necessitate a "how" question. This suggests that knowledge is not solely inferential but also includes non-inferential elements. Furthermore, if knowledge is associated with reasons, what do these reasons consist of? For example, knowing that a philosophy exam is on December 5th might come from a friend's statement rather than direct observation. Such knowledge relies on recall rather than empirical verification. Price (1969) argues that verification of knowledge often depends on empirical experiences. For instance, to verify Helena's claim that it is raining, one need only look outside. Price (1969) writes:

It would follow that there might in fact be many instances of knowledge in the world, many people might be sure of propositions which were as a matter of fact true, and might be sure of them for sufficient reasons; and yet neither we nor they could ever discover that there are all these instances of knowledge. For to discover this, it must be possible for us to find out, for ourselves, what propositions are in fact true. And unless some propositions are directly verifiable or falsifiable, nothing can ever be found out at all (p. 98). Thus, while "correct belief" can sometimes equate to knowledge, this requires the proposition to be true, supported by conclusive reasons, and held with conviction. However, equating knowledge with belief is challenging, especially in propositions like "dead people have rights" or "a person can survive her death," where conviction does not guarantee truth.

A.J. Ayer, in his analysis of truth, argues that a sentence refers only to the assertion or denial of a proposition. Thus, asking for an analysis of "truth" is redundant, as asserting "x is true" is equivalent to asserting "x." For example, saying "death is not the end of life is true" is simply asserting "death is not the end of life." Ayer emphasizes that the focus should be on the conditions that make a proposition true or false, rather than on the concepts of knowledge or belief. He identifies two main types of propositions: empirical propositions (e.g., "I am in love") and a priori propositions (e.g., "The sun rises in the east"). However, some propositions, like "death is not the end of one's personhood," are neither empirical nor a priori. These "transcendental propositions" resist validation through experience or innate knowledge. Ayer concludes that the traditional conception of truth as a "real quality" or "real relation" stems from a failure to analyze sentences correctly.

## THE TEMPORALITY OF BELIEF: HOW TIME SHAPES OUR UNDERSTAND-ING OF DEATH

Beliefs about death are deeply intertwined with our perception of time. Whether rooted in past traditions, present experiences, or future aspirations, temporal perspectives profoundly influence how individuals conceptualize mortality. This section explores how the past, present, and future shape beliefs about death, highlighting the dynamic interplay between time and belief.

Historical and cultural narratives about death provide a foundation for contemporary beliefs. Ancient myths, religious texts, and philosophical treatises have long grappled with the concept of mortality, offering frameworks that continue to influence modern thought. For example, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the oldest known literary works, explores themes of mortality and the search for eternal life, reflecting humanity's enduring preoccupation with death. Similarly, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* provides a detailed account of the afterlife, shaping Tibetan Buddhist beliefs about reincarnation and the continuity of consciousness. These narratives not only reflect historical attitudes toward death but also serve as cultural touchstones that inform present-day beliefs. Present experiences play a crucial role in shaping beliefs about death. Encounters with mortality-whether through the death of a loved one, a near-death experience, or the diagnosis of a terminal illness—often prompt individuals to reevaluate their beliefs. For instance, the grief experienced after losing a family member may lead to a deeper engagement with existential questions or a reaffirmation of religious beliefs about the afterlife. Similarly, near-death experiences, which often involve vivid sensations of peace or transcendence, can profoundly alter an individual's understanding of death. These immediate experiences ground abstract concepts like mortality in personal reality, making them more tangible and emotionally resonant.

Beliefs about the future also shape attitudes toward death. The fear of oblivion, the hope for immortality, or the desire to leave a lasting legacy all influence how individuals approach mortality. For example, the belief in an afterlife can provide comfort and meaning, reducing anxiety about the unknown. Conversely, the fear of eternal nothingness may lead to existential dread or a heightened focus on achieving immortality through legacy-building (e.g., creating art, writing memoirs, or contributing to society). These future-oriented beliefs often coexist with present actions, as individuals strive to reconcile their mortality with their aspirations.

Beliefs about death frequently involve temporal contradictions. For instance, the belief that "death is the end" may coexist with the hope that "my legacy will live on." Such paradoxes reflect the complexity of human thought and the difficulty of reconciling finite existence with infinite aspirations. These contradictions are particularly evident in rituals and practices surrounding death, such as funerals and memorials, which simultaneously acknowledge the finality of death and celebrate the enduring impact of the deceased.

Generational differences provide a compelling lens through which to examine the temporality of belief. Traditional views on death, often rooted in religious or cultural traditions, emphasize continuity and the afterlife. In contrast, modern perspectives, influenced by secularism and scientific advancements, may focus on the biological and existential aspects of mortality. For example, older generations might view death as a transition to another realm, while younger generations may see it as a natural part of life's cycle. These differences highlight how temporal contexts shape beliefs about death. The temporality of belief underscores the dynamic and multifaceted nature of human understanding. By examining how past narratives, present experiences, and future aspirations influence beliefs about death, we gain insight into the complex interplay between time and mortality. This temporal perspective enriches our understanding of belief systems and their role in shaping human behavior.

# INTUITION AND IMAGINATION: THE NON-RATIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF BELIEF

While rational and empirical knowledge play significant roles in shaping beliefs, intuition and imagination often serve as equally powerful foundations, particularly in the realm of existential questions like death. This section explores how non-rational faculties contribute to the formation and expression of beliefs about mortality.

Intuition, often described as a "gut feeling" or innate understanding, plays a crucial role in shaping beliefs about death (Roseman-Halsband 2017). For many, the sense that life continues beyond death or that consciousness transcends the physical body arises not from empirical evidence but from intuitive certainty. This intuitive belief in continuity is evident in widespread cultural and religious practices, such as ancestor worship or the belief in reincarnation. Philosophers like Henri Bergson have argued that intuition provides direct access to truths that transcend rational analysis, making it a valuable tool for grappling with the mysteries of existence.

Imagination allows individuals to conceptualize and explore abstract ideas like death, the afterlife, and immortality. Through imaginative narratives, people can envision scenarios that defy empirical verification, such as heavenly realms, reincarnated lives, or eternal oblivion. Literature, art, and mythology are rich sources of such imaginative explorations. For example, Dante's *Divine Comedy* uses vivid imagery to depict the afterlife, while Emily Dickinson's poetry delves into the emotional and existential dimensions of mortality (Dante, 1320). These imaginative works not only reflect cultural beliefs but also shape individual understandings of death.

Rational and empirical knowledge often fall short in addressing existential questions about death. In such cases, intuition and imagination fill the gaps, providing frameworks for understanding and coping with the unknown. For instance, the finality of death may be difficult to reconcile with the human desire for meaning, leading individuals to rely on intuitive or imaginative beliefs about an afterlife or spiritual continuity. These non-rational beliefs offer comfort and purpose, even in the absence of empirical evidence.

Artistic and literary expressions play a significant role in shaping and communicating beliefs about death. Through creative works, individuals and societies explore the emotional, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions of mortality. For example,

the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* uses poetic language and symbolic imagery to guide the deceased through the afterlife, while contemporary films like *The Tree of Life* use visual storytelling to explore themes of life, death, and transcendence. These creative expressions not only reflect existing beliefs but also inspire new ways of thinking about death.

The role of intuition and imagination in belief formation has been a subject of philosophical debate. Rationalists like Descartes emphasize the primacy of reason and empirical evidence, while existentialists like Kierkegaard and Heidegger highlight the subjective and imaginative dimensions of human experience. For Kierkegaard, faith—an intuitive and imaginative leap—is essential for grappling with existential questions. Similarly, Heidegger's concept of "being-toward-death" underscores the imaginative and intuitive aspects of confronting mortality. These philosophical perspectives provide a framework for understanding the non-rational foundations of belief.

Intuition and imagination are indispensable tools for navigating the mysteries of death. By allowing individuals to transcend the limits of rational and empirical knowledge, these non-rational faculties provide meaning, comfort, and insight into the human condition. Recognizing the role of intuition and imagination enriches our understanding of belief systems and their profound impact on how we perceive and respond to mortality.

#### CONCLUSION

This research has explored the intricate and multifaceted relationship between belief, knowledge, and concepts in the context of death, situating itself within the domain of Philosophical Thanatology. By examining the temporal, linguistic, psychological, and cultural dimensions of belief formation, the study has illuminated the profound ways in which humans grapple with the concept of mortality. Through a combination of philosophical analysis, literary criticism, and cultural studies, the research has revealed that beliefs about death are not static or monolithic but are deeply influenced by historical narratives, personal experiences, and imaginative faculties.

The study has demonstrated that temporality plays a crucial role in shaping beliefs about death. Past cultural and religious narratives provide foundational frameworks, while present experiences of grief, loss, or near-death encounters ground abstract concepts in personal reality. Future-oriented beliefs, such as hope for an afterlife or fear of oblivion, further complicate our understanding of mortality, often leading to paradoxical attitudes that reflect the tension between finite existence and infinite aspirations. These temporal dimensions highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of belief systems. Furthermore, the research has underscored the significance of intuition and imagination in forming and expressing beliefs about death. When rational and empirical knowledge fall short in addressing existential questions, non-rational faculties step in to provide meaning and comfort. Through literature, art, and mythology, individuals and societies explore the unknowable aspects of death, creating narratives that transcend empirical verification. These imaginative explorations not only reflect cultural beliefs but also shape individual understandings of mortality, demonstrating the interplay between creativity and existential inquiry.

The study has also emphasized the role of language in shaping and communicating beliefs about death. Linguistic structures, metaphors, and performative statements influence how we conceptualize and articulate mortality, often blurring the lines between belief and knowledge. The analysis of first-person and third-person belief statements has revealed the performative and conviction-driven nature of belief, highlighting the complex relationship between language, thought, and action. In addressing the epistemological and ontological dimensions of belief, the research has shown that knowledge and belief are not mutually exclusive but exist on a spectrum. While knowledge is often associated with empirical evidence and rational justification, belief encompasses a broader range of cognitive and emotional processes, including intuition, imagination, and cultural conditioning. The study has challenged the notion that belief is inferior to knowledge, arguing instead that belief serves as a vital tool for navigating the uncertainties of existence.

Finally, this research contributes to Philosophical Thanatology by offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the human engagement with death. By integrating insights from philosophy, literature, and cultural studies, the study bridges the gap between abstract theoretical inquiry and lived human experience. It highlights the centrality of belief in shaping existential attitudes and behaviors, offering new perspectives on the philosophical and cultural significance of death. In conclusion, this research affirms that beliefs about death are not merely intellectual constructs but are deeply embedded in the fabric of human existence. They reflect our attempts to make sense of the unknown, to find meaning in the face of mortality, and to reconcile the finite with the infinite. By exploring the interplay between belief, knowledge, and concepts, this study enriches our understanding of the human condition and the enduring quest to comprehend the mystery of death.

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