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Natality and Relational Transcendence in Humanist Chaplaincy

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Abstract: Every life has a beginning and an end. Natality and mortality are both profound existential fundaments of life that may lead us to question meaning in life as well as to find meaning. In spiritual care, the focus is often on mortality as a source of existential suffering, and on ways to deal with such suffering according to worldview traditions. In humanist traditions, mortality is not only seen as an existential threat but also as an existential given that people need to embrace to find meaning in life. Natality has received much less attention, both in spiritual care and in humanist thought. In this article, we build on philosophical ideas of Arendt and Butler to explore the significance of natality for a humanist perspective on meaning in life and spiritual care. We argue that taking natality into account results in a relational understanding of humanist spiritual care in which the notion of "relational transcendence" is a central element. Natality also means that we can initiate, create, and act in the world, which highlights the political dimension of humanist spiritual care. We reflect on the implications of natality and relational transcendence for humanist spirituality and chaplaincy and formulate some concrete building blocks for working from this perspective.

Keywords: humanism; chaplaincy; spiritual care; natality; relationality; transcendence

1. Introduction

Birth and death are both profound and transitory life events that are associated with spiritual questions and experiences. Both the beginning and the end of life put us into a liminal, in-between state that is characterized by ambiguity and a restructuring of social statuses, such as from fetus to baby, from living to dead (Grimes 2002; Turner 1969; Van Gennep 1960). Both transitions reveal a higher density of existential and spiritual questioning (Grimes 2002; Turner 1969; Jacinto and Buckey 2013; Van Gennep 1960). While death has been intensively studied in relation to spirituality and spiritual care (Baldacchino 2015; Gillilan et al. 2017; Koper et al. 2019), birth has not received the same attention (Crowther and Hall 2018). Spirituality and spiritual care have been, at present, especially emphasized from the perspective of mortality. Death, as an existential concern, has been extensively theorized as an important disruptive experience or life transition, leading to questions and sources of spirituality. Moreover, spiritual care is generally accepted as an integral dimension of palliative care, aimed at relieving spiritual struggles (Puchalski et al. 2014). Currently, there is more focus on the spiritual dimension of pregnancy and birth (Crowther et al. 2014, 2015; Prinds et al. 2016; Hansen et al. 2020; Wojtkowiak 2020; Wojtkowiak and Crowther 2018) as well as more focus on fundamental, philosophical, and theoretical studies of the meaning of birth (Bornemark and Smith 2016; Hennessey 2019; Schües 2008).

In this article, we use birth as an entry point for exploring spiritual care from secular perspectives. More specifically, we will study the concept of natality in the context of humanist chaplaincy. Natality refers to the condition of being born and chaplains are experts in providing spiritual care and have been working in the "spiritual domain" for many decades. Traditionally, the care they provided was grounded in Christian faith (Cadge 2019). Nowadays, chaplaincy is developing into a diverse profession, both in terms of the various

contexts in which chaplains work, such as health care, prisons, the military or after collective disaster, and in terms of worldviews, including chaplains with Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu and humanist affiliations or unaffiliated chaplains (Liefbroer and Olsman 2020; Liefbroer et al. 2019; Nolan and MacLaren 2021; Savage 2019; Schuhmann et al. 2020). The common denominator in the work that all these chaplains do is usually understood in terms of spirituality: all chaplains, irrespective of their worldview background and the context in which they work, provide spiritual care. The presupposition here is that spirituality is not necessarily associated with religion but rather refers to a universal human experience (De Jager Meezenbroek et al. 2012). At the same time, as secular types of chaplaincies, such as humanist chaplaincy, are gaining ground in secularizing societies, the question has been raised whether secular chaplaincy can be understood as a spiritual profession or rather should be seen as just another form of therapy (Nolan and MacLaren 2021). In this article, we respond to this question by exploring the spiritual dimension of humanist chaplaincy—a specific and relatively well-established form of secular chaplaincy, for instance in the Netherlands (Schuhmann et al. 2020).

The starting point of our explorations is the idea that natality is a central aspect of the human condition, as it was put forward by Jewish–German author Hannah Arendt (Arendt 1958). She positions natality as a fundament of our lives that influences the way we see and act in the world (Arendt 1958). Natality therefore seems an important concept for developing humanist perspectives on life, as it points at a meaningful transition that is shared by all human beings and that is the source of life: we are all born. Still, natality has not been extensively explored in relation to humanism as a worldview. In humanist traditions, mortality is seen as the fundamental existential given; human beings need to accept mortality to live a meaningful life. But what is the meaning of birth in humanist thought? Furthermore, although birth is a fundamental human experience—we are all born, might experience the birth of a new human and are related to newborns and future generations—birth has not been theorized in relation to humanist chaplaincy. There are some authors who have acknowledged the meaning of natality for spiritual care and pastoral work (Jantzen 2001; Barrow 2017). In this article, we will explicitly focus on humanist chaplaincy. The central research question in this article is: what does it mean for humanist understandings of spirituality and spiritual practice to integrate the notion of natality as central in human existence?

The aim of this article is thus twofold: first, to develop a more thorough understanding of humanist spirituality from the perspective of natality, and, second, to use these theoretical insights for developing concrete building blocks for the practice of spiritual care from a humanist perspective. When answering the central question, we will not only use the concept of natality by Arendt (1958) but also the notion of relational transcendence, a notion that we will develop using work by the American philosopher Judith Butler; a notion that, as we will argue, is closely related to natality. First, we will shed some light on the role of the end of life in humanist chaplaincy and discuss how mortality relates to questions of transcendence. Then, we will discuss the beginning of life, on the basis of work of Arendt (1958), and explain how that relates to a notion of relational transcendence that is helpful for understanding humanist spirituality. Finally, we will conclude by elaborating on a natality perspective on humanist spirituality and humanist chaplaincy.

2. Humanism and Transcendence

Chaplains work in a domain where their clients are facing tragedy, loss and grief on a daily basis. Some clients might experience spiritual struggles that challenge their orienting system, for instance when facing illness, death or trauma (Pargament and Exline 2022). A focus on death in spiritual care is therefore understandable and important. In philosophy, as well as psychology, death has been extensively studied, think for example of Heidegger's notion of *Being-towards-death*, Becker's focus on denial of death, or the large study field of Terror Management Theory in psychology (Becker 1973; Burke et al. 2010; Heidegger 1953). These theories emphasize how death relates to our individuality (e.g., the

individual must face their own death; no one can die in your place, see Baumeister 1991) and dying in Western contexts has been argued to be a lonely process (Elias 2001). Many humanist thinkers have put mortality at the center of meaning making, and see death both as a challenge and a source of meaning (e.g., Frankl 1958; Yalom 1980). These views on death do not involve a belief in supernatural beings or in a literal afterlife. This "non-belief" is often put forward as characteristic of humanism as a worldview (Schuhmann et al. 2020). From a humanist perspective, although humans may "live on" in memories and in social and symbolic bonds after death, the focus is still on life before death, our life here on earth. The central existential question is how life before death may become meaningful. This, in our view, stresses the importance of paying attention not only to mortality but also and especially to birth and natality in understanding humanist spirituality. In fact, when speaking about birth, people use terms such as the mysteriousness of life, awe and wonder, beauty, sacredness, or transcendence, which also points at the spiritual dimension of natality (Crowther and Hall 2018; Kaufman and Morgan 2005; Prinds et al. 2014; Gillilan et al. 2017; Wojtkowiak and Crowther 2018; Wojtkowiak 2020).

A suitable starting point for further developing a secular, humanist notion of spirituality that is helpful in the context of humanist chaplaincy is the consensus definition by Puchalski et al. (2014) that is commonly used in relation to spiritual care: "Spirituality is the dynamic dimension of human life that relates to the way persons (individual and community) experience, express and/or seek meaning, purpose and transcendence, and the way they connect to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, to the significant, and/or the sacred" (p. 644). From a secular perspective, it is especially the notion of transcendence that requires clarification in this consensus definition. Traditional religious understandings of transcendence as referring to an eternal entity or realm beyond our world may clash with secular and, in particular, humanist views. Key to arriving at a better understanding of spirituality and spiritual care in secular contexts is therefore a further enquiry into secular understandings of transcendence. Later, we will argue that by emphasizing natality instead of mortality as an existential given, we arrive at a secular understanding of transcendence that flows from a relational view of human life.

The relevance of transcendence in secular contexts is often expressed by means of the term "horizontal transcendence" (Coleman et al. 2013; Goodenough 2001). The idea is that "non-believers are not immune to the transcendent feelings of awe and beauty" (Coleman et al. 2013, p. 11), and that these feelings may be experienced in relation to phenomena in this world. Several thinkers have elaborated on the notion of horizontal transcendence from a humanist perspective. The Dutch philosopher and humanist Harry Kunneman (2007), for instance, conceptualizes horizontal transcendence referring to the horizon of transcendent values within which we live in modern secularizing and spiritually diversifying societies. Horizontal transcendence is characterized by acknowledging this horizon and thus refraining from absolute truth claims when it comes to articulating transcendent values (Kunneman 2007). Kunneman contrasts horizontal transcendence with vertical notions of transcendence, in which transcendence is associated with an absolute power which we must obey. Halsema (2012) elaborates on Kunneman's notion of horizontal transcendence by emphasizing intersubjectivity in horizontal transcendence. She points at ideas by the Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray who understands "horizontal transcendence as something that takes place between two embodied people" (Halsema 2012, p. 97)—an understanding that also informs the work of Kunneman (2007) on horizontal transcendence. In this view, transcendence is horizontal when it involves openness to the irreducible alterity of the other. These humanist perspectives stress the ethical dimension of horizontal transcendence: "'Horizontal transcendence' describes us as culturally embedded and related to one another and has a strong normative aspect: it demands that we keep an open mind for articulations of values other than one's own" (Halsema 2012, p. 91).

In a previous study on humanist chaplaincy, transcendence was linked to a humanist worldview in terms of "a faith in humanity and a belief in (inter)personal human potential" (Schuhmann et al. 2020, p. 13). While humanist chaplains do not believe in a supernatural power to guide their life, they do have faith in humans striving towards the good and caring for all fellow human beings. Having faith in humanity, with all its imperfections, can be understood in terms of horizontal transcendence. It transcends a focus on the individual and at the same time acknowledges the uniqueness of each person. In this paper, we want to build on that notion. How can transcendence in secular contexts be further conceptualized from a humanist perspective? Natality seems a fruitful starting point for elaborating on humanist notions of transcendence, as natality points at embodiment and relationality as inevitable and vital in every human life.

3. Arendt on Birth as Relational New Beginning

Arendt (1958) stresses that humans are plural beings in the sense that we are all equal and distinct at the same time. We are equal because we can communicate with each other. Our unique distinction becomes visible in speech and action. Birth is the pre-condition for action and therefore embodies a new beginning and us as new beginner (Arendt 1958). Arendt distinguishes three human activities: labor, work, and action. Labor is the natural, embodied activity that we conduct with our bodies. Work refers to the production of things, adding an artificial layer to our natural environment and creating a world of objects. Speech and action are the only ways in which humans do not have to refer to any form of materiality and can initiate this activity among each other. This is also why speech and action reveal our uniqueness.

Every human who is born means a new beginning. Natality is the broader philosophical term that puts this biological fact into an existential frame. Natality, according to Arendt, means that humans, all of them embodying a new beginning, have the possibility to initiate and act in the world. Natality is the precondition for action. By acting in the world, as well as by speaking, humans distinguish themselves from one another and reveal their humanity (Arendt 1958, p. 176). Speaking and acting are ways of "inserting ourselves into the human world" (p. 176), which means that we initiate in a world that already exists. Our uniqueness therefore always relates to a web of relations that already existed before us (and will also remain after us). Acting and beginning something new is in Arendt's view the same. Each action enacts something; puts movement into the world. Arendt (1958) writes:

> "This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labor, it is not prompted by utility, like work. [. . .] its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative." (p. 177).

Moreover, Arendt makes clear that initiation and action are always political. She explains that while all three activities (labor, work and action) are "somehow connected to politics" (p. 7), human plurality that is only found in action, is by means the condition of all political life. Arendt argues further that natality, as the precondition for action and plurality, should therefore be considered the frame for political action instead of mortality. Arendt (1958) writes:

> "[T]he new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical thought." (p. 9).

Natality also means relationality. German Philosopher Christina Schües (2008) departs from Arendt's thinking when developing a philosophy of being born. Schües, like Arendt, makes clear that natality always means relationality. Although the new human is unique

and embodies a new beginning, they are always born into an existing world and in relation to others—most obviously the birthing woman or person who carried the baby during pregnancy. Our bodies are therefore always connected to our mother, father or persons who gave us life.

Birth, similarly, to death, is a disruption of life. It changes relationships and the self profoundly. Birth is the moment of transition where the fetus enters the outside, physical world. The world of order changes for the baby from within the body to the world of order outside of the body (Schües 2008). Being born makes it possible to experience and act, in contrast to death, which takes life away and means an ending. Birth means a refreshing ("*Erneuerung*", Schües 2008, p. 215). What is more, natality is the beginning of a "startling unexpectedness" (Arendt 1958, p. 178). A new beginning, and thus each initiative, is not something we can expect. Taking action, thus asks us to embrace this unexpectedness. In other words, we cannot control what will happen when we insert ourselves into the world.

Natality, in our view, shows human potential and our uniqueness and is therefore important to consider in humanist notions of transcendence, and humanist chaplaincy. However, natality also addresses our relationality with others. We are born into a world that already exists; we are strangers that "insert" into the world through action. During pregnancy and at birth this insertion literally takes place through the body of a woman, or the person who brings us into the world. Being a new beginning and being able to express one's uniqueness, thus means being responsible for one's action. At the same time, being always in relation to others also addresses our responsibility. Death might stress our individuality and possibly loneliness, but no one is alone during their birth. After birth, relationality also remains a central aspect of human beings, as we are all shaped by significant relationships, emotionally and biologically. Natality expresses our relationality with the world and with others, which is important for understanding horizontal and relational transcendence. In the following part, this will be discussed further.

4. Relational Transcendence

Arendt's ideas on natality and on action as taking place in a web of relationships also resonate in the work of the American philosopher Judith Butler when she developed a radically relational perspective on ethics. Butler (2005) refers to the work of both Arendt and Levinas when she states that the question that is central in relational life is the question "Who are you?". This is the question that, according to Arendt, is asked of anyone who is being born, the answer to which is disclosed in action (Arendt 1958, p. 178).

Like Arendt, Butler sees human beings primarily as relational beings, as caught up in webs of relationships. Here she also builds on the idea by Levinas (1969) that we emerge as subjects by responding to an unwilled address from the other: it is only in the face of the other that we find meaning. Butler understands human beings as implicated in each other's existence in various ways that they cannot fully give an account of. She points at various aspects of human life that undermine the idea that humans are self-transparent creatures. One of these aspects is the fact that human beings are born:

> "The 'I' can neither tell the story of its own emergence nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, which are prior to one's own emergence as a subject who can know" (Butler 2005, p. 37).

The fact that we are all born also points to our embodiment. This is another aspect of human life that, according to Butler, cannot be put into our accounts about us: our bodily exposure to one another cannot be captured in the accounts that we give of ourselves. Therefore, as soon as we try to explain who we are, we have, in a sense, already lost ourselves: "I am, as it were, always other to myself, and there is no final moment in which my return to myself takes place" (Butler 2005, p. 27).

Transcendence is, in this view, not an optional surplus in our lives but a constitutive element in relational being. Otherness is part of who we are, and this concerns in the first place the otherness of those in the relational context into which we are born as embodied creatures. Butler speaks about this relational context in terms of "primary relations, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life" (p. 39). These impressions by others constitute who we are, but cannot be traced back to these others, which means that we are inextricably intertwined with these others. Before birth, this entanglement obviously has a bodily character. More generally, relational transcendence extends to all encounters with other human beings, as we cannot account for our bodily exposure to them, nor the way in which we are addressed by these others or the norms that govern the encounter. This relational notion of transcendence, grounded in natality, does fit in with humanist notions of horizontal transcendence that were discussed earlier, but adds an element of relational entanglement. In this view it is emphasized that when we answer the question "who are you?" in terms of action and speech, as Arendt states, and show ourselves by taking initiative, then the "you" who is revealed is not an individualized entity. The "you" only exists through a "we", which becomes most centrally visible during our birth.

In her work, Butler emphasizes the ethical and political implications of relational being, and these considerations also apply to the notion of relational transcendence. According to Butler, if one cannot give a full, transparent account of who one is, then ethics cannot be grounded in the demand for a self-confident, "true" account. In Butler's relational ethics, a notion of recognition that is based on the question "Who are you?" as mentioned earlier, is central. A relational politics would then aim at creating space for encounters where this question is kept alive.

5. A Natality Perspective on Humanist Chaplaincy

How do these philosophical reflections on natality and the related concept of relational transcendence translate to a "natality perspective" on humanist spirituality and on humanist chaplaincy? In order to address this question we now examine how our reflections on natality and relational transcendence may inform a humanist understanding of spirituality, and what are the practical consequences of this understanding for providing humanist spiritual care. As we will describe below, these examinations lead to the identification of five key aspects of a "natality perspective" on humanist spirituality. For each of these aspects, we further explore what are the practical implications of the aspect for providing humanist spiritual care. The main results of these examinations are brought together in Table 1. In the left column, we list the five key aspects of humanist spirituality form the perspective of natality, and in the right column we list concrete, practical building blocks for humanist chaplaincy that are linked with the various aspects. By using the term "building blocks", we emphasize that we do not offer an exhaustive scheme or frame for a natality perspective on humanist chaplaincy, but rather a first attempt to identify a set of elements that are crucial when looking at humanist chaplaincy from the perspective of natality.

First, the notion of being able to act and initiate, which is related to natality, emphasizes our potential for action. For humanist spirituality this means that humans have the capacity to act and initiate in ways that are unexpected to themselves and others. Our birth means the beginning of "startling unexpectedness" (Arendt 1958, p. 178). Through speech and action, we insert ourselves into the world. The chaplain embraces the unexpectedness in their encounter with others and empowers them to be seen and heard in the world and public domain, and critically questions institutions and society concerning the space for action and speech. Acting and taking initiative therefore also mean taking responsibility. Humans act and take initiative in the world and in the public domain. Natality, as a fundamental aspect of humanity, does not mean that society will give space for all people to act. Voices and actions can be neglected or even shut down and, in our understanding, from the perspective of natality, chaplains can empower those to speak who are not heard, as well as those to act, who seem unable to act.

Table 1. Natality and relational transcendence in humanist spirituality and chaplaincy.

Elements of Natality Perspective in Humanist Spirituality	Building Blocks for a Natality Perspective in Humanist Chaplaincy
Humans have the capacity to act, to initiate, in ways that are unexpected to themselves and others, and this action and speech is realized in the public domain	• Chaplains remain open for the unexpected in the encounter with others • Chaplains work towards empowerment; they support clients to be heard and seen in public space • Chaplains critically question institutions and society concerning the space that is allowed for action and speech
Humans have the capacity to act, even in the face of tragedy and suffering	• Chaplains represent the faith that clients have a potential to act, even when clients feel overpowered by the situation they are in • Chaplains take a hopeful stance while acknowledging the suffering of clients
Humans are relationally entangled: otherness is part of who we are	• Chaplains keep the question "who are you?" alive in encounters with others • Chaplains aim for relational well-being
Action takes place in webs of relationships; we connect with others in ways that can never be fully predicted	• Chaplains represent a moral view of relational autonomy; in particular, they realize that clients act within this relational space and are not fully in control of the effects of their actions • Chaplains remain present, even in desperate situations: relational presence is hopeful
Webs of relationships are "relationships of bodies"; action takes place in embodied space	• Chaplains pay attention to processes of bodily attunement

A second aspect of humanist spirituality from the perspective of natality means that action and speech is possible, even in the most tragic and dark moments in our lives. Many authors have written about the meaning of suffering and the potential that lies in facing one's fate, however difficult that might be (Baumeister 1991; Frankl 1958; Park 2010; Yalom 1980). By embracing natality as existential frame, humanist chaplains can develop a spirituality where recognition of human suffering and tragedy is not at odds with the capacity to act and initiate. More concretely, for chaplains this means that they represent the faith in human potential to act. Moreover, the chaplain's presence is hopeful for those in need as the chaplain acknowledges their suffering. Natality is hopeful, but not in a direct or superficial way. Hope is not something chaplains can give just like that (not "all will be well"; "there is still hope"). However, even when a situation is experienced as hopeless, in the relational moment there is hope, in particular between chaplain and client. From an interview study with chaplains was shown that hope is an important aspect of the work, same as despair (Liefbroer and Olsman 2020). The chaplain is present for those in despair and in moments when hope arises. Hope can be felt while affirming the experience of despair. Grace Jantzen (2001) writes about natality as "the condition of hope, and, of future" and as moral imaginary "that takes up the tough fragility of life, its hopefulness and its possibilities, its interconnectedness and the dependence of its flourishing on the whole web of life around it" (Jantzen 2001, p. 229). Hope does emerge from relationality. From our view, hope arises within this relational and natal perspective on life.

A third aspect of humanist spirituality from a natality perspective refers to the notion of relational transcendence. The absolute human relationality manifests during pregnancy and birth and means that we are always entangled with others. "Existence means to be from somebody" (Schües 2002, p. 186). Relational transcendence also provides a critical perspective on humanism, in particular concerning the central humanist idea that human beings are and should be autonomous. In this perspective, we cannot fully know or express who we are and what are our beliefs and motivations; our autonomy is necessarily limited.

Furthermore, in a relational perspective, we are vulnerable to one another, be it in the sense that others may hurt us or in the sense that we may lose those with whom we are inextricably intertwined. This does also have implications for humanist chaplaincy. It means that, in view of relational entanglement, humanist chaplains should not see it as their primary task to promote autonomy of clients, at least not in the sense of being independent from or invulnerable to others. Inspired by the relational ethics that Butler (2005) develops, the task of humanist chaplains may rather be seen as supporting clients to live a full relational life, even though this involves being vulnerable to violence and loss (Schuhmann 2021). Humanist chaplaincy then promotes relational well-being (Schuhmann 2016).

Fourth, action takes place within a web of relationships and in ways that can never be fully predicted. Every human, as well as their action and initiatives, are relational and therefore related to the web of relations, such as the chaplain and the client, significant others, but also generations that came and will come before and after us. The connections of humans cannot be predicted. The chaplain represents a moral view of relational autonomy. Natality means that we are not isolated, individual beings. Although our individuality becomes visible in our action and initiatives, it always remains relational. Individuality, therefore, does not in any way denounce relationality, same as Arendt (1958) already argued. The chaplain empowers the client's initiatives but is also aware of the unpredictability that the client's action can lead to. The effects of our own actions can never be fully grasped. However, we must be aware that in our action and initiatives, our humanity becomes visible. Our actions and speech thus show how we understand humanity.

Finally, looking at spirituality from the perspective of natality necessarily means to address the body and embodiment in spiritual care. Our birth literally means coming from the body of another human and after birth we are completely depended on others who care and carry us until we can walk by ourselves and feed ourselves. While Arendt's work has somewhat neglected theorizing the body in relation to natality (Söderbäck 2018), we would like to add some thoughts on humanist spirituality from a body-sensitive perspective. This is also in line with the attention that Butler (2005), as we saw earlier, gives to embodiment, and that we integrated in our notion of relational transcendence. As natality emphasizes our relationality and relationality means being in webs of relations, it essentially refers to a web of bodies. For instance, trauma sensitive theology and trauma-focused interventions focus strongly on body-based spiritual practices, such as ritual, theater and mindfulness (Baldwin 2018; van der Kolk 2014). Furthermore, in chaplaincy and spiritual care, the bodily presence is of great importance. The chaplain and client, who are in a relationship, are engaged in a process of mutual bodily attunement. Our body is crucial in how we are in the world, how we interact and show ourselves and the same time it is our body that is the most vulnerable. It can be hurt, damaged, ridiculed or inappropriately commented on, which is also for chaplains an important topic to consider. Bodily attuning to someone else, means to be "congruent" within oneself (Rogers 1957) *and* with the other. Body-based spiritual care always refers to embodied, relational and transcendent benevolence, compassion and goodness (Doehring 2019).

Some Further Thoughts on Natality in Humanist Spirituality

Natality as frame for humanist spirituality and chaplaincy offers in our view many interesting insights. There are, however, also aspects that could be discussed further. Birth connects us to other humans and through our birth we enter the world, but the intertwinement with others is not always coherent. We can lose contact with those who were at our birth, or we cannot physically be with them. Nevertheless, the notion of us coming from others will remain with us. For some this idea might be comforting, for others it might be problematic, because there are situations where we want to break the bonds with those who created or cared for us. Natality as a spiritual frame for humanist chaplaincy goes beyond biological bonds at birth or relationships with those who are physically present in our lives, as birth also represents generativity. We are connected with

previous and future generations. This relationality also means a responsibility that goes beyond our personal life, but is bound to others, as well as generations before and after us. This leads to certain moral implications as well and raises questions for the public domain, such as who do we collectively remember in commemorative rituals and what are we going to do to provide for future generations in terms of ecological durability? As Arendt already states, being bound to others does not mean that we cannot be unique. Secular and humanist notions of transcendence can be found in this relationality and are part of every human life. We are plural beings: we are unique through our action, and we are bound with others.

The plurality of being might also be challenging. The unique person is born in a world that already exists. Our action influences the world as it is but might also challenge us. We are not always "in sync" with the world as it manifests to us. Therefore, natality, as well as the condition to be able to act and initiate, reveal moral and political questions as well. Before we act, we must think about the moral implication of that action, and to act and initiate ultimately means to take responsibility. As we initiate within a web of relations, sometimes our actions are not wanted or even prohibited. Natality is important for humanist spirituality and for the question what the humanist chaplain represents. Chaplains are not neutral, psychological counsellors, but they represent a moral worldview. We think that natality and relational transcendence, can help to explicitly formulate that worldview and are thus important for secular, in particular humanist chaplains.

Finally, embracing a natality perspective in humanist spirituality emphasizes the importance of focusing more on the body and embodiment as important topics and tools in chaplaincy and spiritual care. Chaplains need to be aware of their own bodily presence and how this can be attuned with others.

6. Conclusions

Spirituality and spiritual care have often been related to end of life issues and our mortality. In this article we argued that birth and the beginning of life deserve the same attention in thinking about spirituality and spiritual care. We have argued that natality can open new perspectives on humanist spirituality and is therefore important in the practice of humanist chaplaincy and secular spiritual care. We have reflected on the concepts of natality and relational transcendence from two main authors, Arendt and Butler, as they reveal existential frames that can be useful in humanist chaplaincy and secular spiritual care. We hope that this article will contribute to the discussion on contemporary views on secular and humanist spirituality and spiritual care.

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