
ETERNAL LIFE?

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Abstract

Is it ethical for individuals, or for society generally, to take advantage of technologies that will change our entire notion of what it means to age? Is it okay to want to live forever? The problem of relationship between Psychology, Ethics, religion and Science is clearly reflected by this question, since religion clearly answers them, while modern science is pursuing them by large steps. Ethics inherently cannot provide an unequivocal answer, psychology speaks about emotions as stirred with every individual by the presumption of death, religion clearly answers them, the Orthodox viewpoint has been presented as the least elaborated by literature.

Keywords: psychology, ethics, religion, Terror Management Theory, Orthodox Christianity

1. Introduction

Great number of scientists posed a question of man's desire to live forever. The problem of relationship between psychology, ethics, religion and science is clearly reflected by this question, since religion clearly answers them, while modern science is pursuing them by large steps. Ethics inherently cannot provide an unequivocal answer [1], since utilitarianism has to decide whether investments into science, in order to realize this pursuit, provides happiness for the largest number of people, and furthermore, whether the achieved immortality has the same consequences (feasibility). It is highly difficult to formulate the categorical imperative of 'Live forever' from the deontological point of view, while Aristotle school fails to consider this issue at all, due to the fact that it contemplates virtue and fails to define eternal life as human virtue. Whether we like it or not, we need to turn to psychology as well [2]. Psychology does not negate human mortality [3]. Moreover, Psychology speaks about emotions as stirred with every individual by the presumption of death [4, 5]. Therefore, TMT theory (Terror Management Theory) is applied as the theoretic context of this explanation [6, 7]. Religious viewpoint is inevitable in this pursuit, thus, the Orthodox viewpoint has been presented as the least elaborated by literature. Possible answers to this question were derived and we are presenting them, leaving the readers to decide which suits them the best.

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2. Feasibility of the human pursuit of immortality (utilitarian answer)

Before attempting to answer this question, we need to distinguish the feasibility and desirability of this human pursuit. Whether this pursuit is essentially ethical or not, may be answered only through utilitarian analysis. In order to determine the feasibility of this human pursuit, the first step is the utilitarian estimation to justify huge investments into the research aiming to prolong human life forever. The conclusion which may be drawn from the first stage of utilitarian calculation is that, being inherently uncertain, the enormous investments are entirely unjustified since they fail to provide happiness for large number of people and they might be spent quite differently. The second level of utilitarian analysis is to answer the question whether eternal life brings happiness to the large number of people, justifying thereby the current unfortunate conditions, since investments may be distributed in a different manner. Namely, with the success of modern Science in its pursuit, the following questions would be posed: how to distribute the result in a most correct manner and how would life look like on the planet with immortality granted to all living inhabitants, both in the present and in the future? The next question is the following: which is the optimum number of people who will live on the Earth happily and thus, this kind of research can bring happiness and prosperity to all of them? [8] The next question is how to optimize the number of immortal people? It would be possibly by holding up reproduction [9] and removing the surplus people by various incurable diseases and direct removal; natural disasters would possibly do their share as well. The next thing would be reaching consensus about whether all people want to be immortal (what to do with those who do not want it). Naturally, there is always the possibility of voluntary ending of the immortal individuals' own life.... All in all, some form of a totalitarian social system would be possible to create, which would probably answer all these questions in utilitarian spirit [10]. With the success of modern science in its pursuit to achieve immortality, it is extremely difficult to give any prediction regarding the mankind's condition. (According to Sherwin Nuland [10], author of a now infamous article in *Technology Review* on the SENS program, de Grey [1] approaches this question from a rights perspective. Nuland suggests de Grey's belief that "the most basic right that any human being has is to live as long as he wants to...the most basic right is the right to stay alive". Nuland disputes this and states that, as far as conventional ethics conceptualizes 'rights', the right to stay alive "is not a right at all". Insofar as many of de Grey's claims are based upon a fundamental 'right' that many ethicists believe is not a 'right' at all, this problem may be similar to those found in other areas of bioethics where debates are ongoing because incompatible consequentialist and deontological positions, for example, are unable to find a common frame of reference.)

On the other hand, there is an analysis of desirability of such condition. Before saying anything on this topic, we need to see what stands behind this question. According to our humble opinion, it is primarily a fear of death. In

order to explain this phenomenon in the best possible way, we need to turn to TMT. TMT is a theory originating from the late 1980's and such human condition would cancel it.

3. Is it ethical to want to live forever? Psychology

Terror management theory (TMT) is a theory within Psychology that focuses on, according to the theory, the implicit emotional reactions of people that occur when confronted with the psychological terror of knowing we will eventually die [11]. Empirical support for TMT has originated from more than 175 published experiments which have been conducted cross-culturally both nationally and internationally [12].

This theory was developed by Professor Sheldon Solomon, Professor Jeff Greenberg and Professor Tom Pyszczynsky. Inspired with the theory of Ernest Becker [13], they attempted to explain the motivators of human behaviour in circumstances of constant perception of life threat. Also, they attempted to avoid any form of mystical transcendence (heavens, reincarnation, etc.) in their theory. It is based on the assumption that consciousness of the own mortality may be considered as a constant source of pain [14]. According to the authors, there is built-in life-saving motive in the man, so an unsolvable paradox is created by constant pain as the result of finite life and the effects of this motive [15]. The TMT is based on two hypotheses: mortality salience hypothesis, saying that individuals are protecting themselves against this paradox by self-esteem and cultural background, and the anxiety-buffer hypothesis, saying that self-esteem and cultural background are buffers which serve to insulate humans from death [14]. Experiments supporting the two hypotheses above have been conducted in the US, Canada, Israel, Japan and the Netherlands [16]. Terror management theory is a master motivational theory, attempting to link human drives together under the rubric of the fear of death [17]. According to Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski [18], *all anxiety is derived from self-preservation instincts*. TMT further argues that fear of death is the central force in evolution, motivating genetic self-preservation instincts in species and promoting natural selection [15]. Emotion is both motivational and evolutionary [19]. In spite of these obvious similarities, the amount of effort directed at examining affect and emotion in the process of terror management and elicited by mortality salience has been limited [12]. The following will examine the role that emotion plays in the terror management and the discrete emotions elicited by mortality salient primes.

Fear is a basic emotion, related primarily to the dilemma of 'fight or flight'. From Nuland's question [10] it is clear that science is perceived as a pugnacious response to the fear of death. He seems somehow convinced in its victory and poses the question of ethical aspect of this struggle. According to the theory, it is a correct answer and the question of individuals trying to insulate themselves from fear of death through science and self-esteem. Hence, from the standpoint of TMT theory, this is an entirely normal question which fails to get

an exact answer, but insulates from the fear of death. According to this theory, the motive of life-saving is inherent to humans, and the question of ethical approach to this pursuit is impossible to pose. The only thing to say is that this question results from the above mentioned human motive and that it is inherent by itself and the introduction of ethical dimension represents the use of ethics to justify the question to which the answer is already known: yes, I want to live and yes, I know I will eventually die. The intolerability of such conflict-burden situation has been resolved by the faith in inevitable advancement of science, its victory over death, and consideration of consequences of such struggle, both during the struggle and the consequences of victory.

4. Religion and science

Before giving the second possible answer to this question, we need to consider the relation between Science and religion [20]. According to it, Science and religion can be in conflict. Advocates of this viewpoint believe that many historical examples are speaking in favor of this (Galileo Galilee, the standpoint Pope Benedict regarding the counter productivity of use of condom in AIDS prevention in Africa). Jerry Coyne believes that religion and Philosophy are simply incompatible [21], while Neil Degrasse Tyson [22] believes that scientists as Galileo and Newton would accomplish much more by failing to adopt certain theological arguments. The second possible relation between Science and religion is their independence. This viewpoint is based on the belief that Science and religion are not in conflict. Instead, they need to go their own ways independently. The third standpoint is based on the belief according to which religion and science need to be in constant dialogue, based on scientific facts and their relation towards religious beliefs [23]. According to the fourth standpoint, scientific and religious beliefs need to be integrated [24]. It is interesting to note that a large number of researches were conducted in the US aiming to determine scientists' attitude towards religion, i.e. whether they believe in God or not [25].

5. Is it ethical to want to live forever? Another possible answer

By asking this question scientists follows the authentic Orthodox Christianity. They have been asking a direct, clear and deeply, morally rooted question on the sense, psychology and ethics of technological race, the goal of which is in improvement of the quality of human life, its elongation and seeking eternal life. In the circumstances of a broken mirror, when a man ceased to be the reflection of God's image, when the natural community between man and God is disrupted and when science fails to join the pieces, despite its tremendous efforts and amazing achievements, giving us only fragmentary answers together, this question seems rather reasonable. Likewise, this question contains the essential issue of the sense of human existence, as well as the common human ethics disconnected from its fundamental purpose: the eternal community of man and God is becoming merely a sort of comfort since it lacks the answer on the

essential question: what is the purpose of being ethical if, one way or another, we all have to die, some sooner, some later [26]. By its nature, Science is human-body oriented, trying by all means to find the key of human life elongation and the keys of eternal biological life. Hence the race for eternal life (we all know, either on conscious or unconscious level, that we are destined to fail, since the only thing man must do is to die) seems to be deeply absurd and we seek to rationalize our existence in this world. Ethics as a whole and Psychology are only a sort of excuse of living (progress, welfare, science). God permitted the existence of Science and man has been given the freedom to pursue Science. However, any science which is developed to its ultimate frontiers and whose deepest purpose is not the revelation of the Maker's grandeur and his thought which is unconceivable to man is destined to turn against man and become self-sufficient, i.e. absurd. God has made man out of pure love in order to dwell with him in eternity. As uncreated, God is eternal, while a man, as a creature has his beginning, but he is created to achieve eternal community with its maker. Since God gave man free will, not coercing him to eternal community in any way, man is permitted to live his life as he wants. Adam's abruption of community with God made every God's creature mortal. Death and perish became part of man's life. However, to answer the question in the light of Orthodox Christianity we must emphasize the foundation upon which Christianity is based: God sent his son Jesus Christ with both divine and human nature. His son laid his life in order to reestablish the community of all mankind with its maker by means of resurrection, both in flesh and soul. In this way mankind was shown and proven that there is no death. By his magnificent resurrection, Jesus Christ has once again unified all mankind and the maker, both within himself as well as by his resurrection. One cannot speak of Christianity without faith in resurrection which is a historical fact. In this way death is eradicated, the issue of life's purpose ceased to exist since the purpose of human existence has reappeared in all its beauty, and this is the community with the Maker. Hence, Orthodox Christianity is not about any humble serving of God by man, it is not about God as an astringent judge monitoring every human error; it is not about their mutual legal relationship and cruel punishment. Orthodoxy does not call for some eternal life. It simply states that all that is created will achieve eternity only in community with the Maker and that the creature himself cannot provide eternity neither through any science nor by merely abide by ethical laws. Orthodox Christianity is about mutual community based on love (force that keeps the atoms together, love of God which makes all his creatures in community with him imperishable). All at once, all science becomes essentially reasonable, a comfort to mankind and pledge of faith, discovering all God's wisdom as of the creator to man (genetics as a pledge of statement that man will resurrect both in flesh and soul, a permission to man to equally participate in creation...). The only limit is in the fact that if man disrupts his natural relation with God, he is self-destined to death and perishes and that whenever he attempts to place himself above his creator, he automatically becomes inevitably mortal. Any technological advance has its

deep sense, ethics has its rightful place in life, and the question why to be ethical has its unambiguous answer [26]. Then we realize that Christianity and ethics contained within it include all ethical directions, from deontology through utilitarianism; from moral imperative which transits into the imperative of community with God, thereby providing happiness to all mankind. Surely, it is not an ethics with juridical content, but ethics based on mutual love between the Maker and man.

6. Conclusions

In one way or another, the death as a phenomenon which continues to exist along with the fear of death as well. On the other hand, while I am writing this paper, Science is struggling hardly to defeat death, the disease of all diseases. We are aware that even the TMT theory cannot fully explain the nature of the question and that even the integration of Science and religion cannot provide the scientific community with a satisfying answer. Also, we are aware of the fact that without the minimum of dialogue between religion and Science, even the situation described in the introductory part of this work may come true. Therefore, dear reader, before you decide which of these three answers suits you the best, we will quote a part of the article written by Albert Einstein in New York Times, in 1930 [27]: *“Accordingly, a religious person is devout in the sense that he has no doubt of the significance and loftiness of those super personal objects and goals which neither require nor are capable of rational foundation. They exist with the same necessity and matter-of-factness as he himself. In this sense religion is the age-old endeavor of mankind to become clearly and completely conscious of these values and goals and constantly to strengthen and extend their effect. If one conceives of religion and science according to these definitions then a conflict between them appears impossible. For science can only ascertain what is, but not what should be, and outside of its domain value judgments of all kinds remain necessary. Religion, on the other hand, deals only with evaluations of human thought and action: it cannot justifiably speak of facts and relationships between facts. According to this interpretation the well-known conflicts between religion and science in the past must all be ascribed to a misapprehension of the situation which has been described.”*

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