

## Session plan: Eternal Life

Our topics for today are immortality and life extension. We're going to think about what it would be like to live indefinitely, or at least for a really really long time.

Let's start with a short video.

### **SLIDE: PBS clip**

(5 mins)

**PLAY video clip** – abridged version of Nova PBS clip 'Cryonics'.

(Full video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Duy-W3-Gkhg> )

### **Discussion about cryonic preservation (freezing your body at the point of death)**

(30 – 35 mins)

Would you do it? Why/why not?

Should it be allowed? For whom?

How would cryonic preservation affect the perception of personhood?

How would it affect the availability of resources for the population?

Would there be a problem of 'identity'? Would the transformations of the body and mind allow for a long-term preservation of identity

**PLAY video clip** beginning "No one is immune from the ravages of time..." – the opening minutes of the video 'Forever Young: The promise of human regeneration' from the World Science Festival.

(Full video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0vKOYQUmgg> )

### **Discussion:**

(30 – 35 mins)

Select from the following questions:

**Should we pursue the goal of life extension?**

**Do we have a *social responsibility to promote anti-aging*** given the rapidly aging population, the growing burden of age-related diseases, and the rapid development of medical technologies?

**If yes, why do students feel comfortable with anti-aging but uncomfortable with cryogenics?**

**Will the availability of these technologies create an even more unjust and unequal society, with an even greater disparity between the rich and the poor?**

(Of all the possible concerns and challenges of human life extension, this is probably one of the most likely and disturbing, seeing the present inequalities in the access to health care.) Would the extension of life only be made accessible for the rich and powerful? Would differential access to life-extending technologies threaten the fabric of our society, with jealousy and resentment among the 'have-nots'?

**Is there anything wrong with “meddling” with the aging process?**

If yes: What about promoting healthy lifestyles, or basic hygiene like handwashing which can be life-preserving – are these things ‘meddling’?

**Some people find comfort in accepting aging and death as natural and inevitable. Does the reassurance we might get from accepting the inevitability of aging and death mean that we should stop anti-aging and longevity research?**

**Would an extending longevity make life meaningless?** (Does death give meaning to life?  
OR: Can life have a meaning of its own, independent of death?)

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### **Supplementary material**

**PLAY 2-minute video** *‘Longevity and anti-ageing panel discussion (selected edited excerpts)’*

**Discuss:**

- At what age is a person ‘in their prime’?
- Is ageing a disease?

**End of workshop.**

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Background notes:

Should we pursue the goal of life extension?

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**Is there anything wrong with “meddling” with the aging process?** (What about promoting healthy lifestyles, or basic hygiene like handwashing which can be life-preserving – are these things ‘meddling’?)

**Some people find comfort in accepting aging and death as natural and inevitable. Does the reassurance we might get from accepting the inevitability of aging and death mean that we should stop anti-aging and longevity research?**

**Would an extending longevity make life meaningless?** (Does death give meaning to life? OR: Can life have a meaning of its own, independent of death?)

**Would we have “too many old sick people”?**

Note: is the extension of the human *healthspan* (healthy and productive lifespan) and not just of the *lifespan* that is pursued in the research and development of new medical technologies.

(And anyway, isn't it unfair to think of elderly people as a “liability” to society?)

**Would extending longevity enhance human suffering? (i.e., isn't death a solution against suffering?)**

Is suffering inevitable?

**Would extending longevity lead to extending boredom? (Or would it just give us more opportunities to learn and change?)**

*Similarly:* Would extending longevity stop progress, and make individuals and societies stagnant? (Or would it just give us more opportunities to experiment and develop?)

**Would extending longevity lead to shortage of resources for the society, or “overpopulation”?**

*Argument against the fear of overpopulation due to extended lifespan:* We already have enough technological capabilities are here to feed the world. Then, why are there still famines? It often happens because of mismanagement or because the right technologies are not applied. But technologies generally, or life-extending technologies in particular, should not be considered a cause of overpopulation or shortage of resources. On the contrary, in wealthy, technologically advanced countries, with high life expectancy, there are hardly any signs of “overpopulation” or shortage of resources. “Overpopulation” is often the problem of poorer, “developing” countries that overcompensate for high mortality (low life expectancy) with high birth rates, and that have limited access to medical and technological means to provide for the population increase. Hence, also in those countries, the way to combat overpopulation may be by increasing life expectancy, and the concomitant quality of life, medical and technological capabilities, not by decreasing them.

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Note: a lot of ideas here are drawn from the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies’ webpage ‘Frequently asked questions on the ethics of lifespan and healthspan extension’ by Ilia Stambler, posted Jun 8 2017.

<https://ieet.org/index.php/IEET2/more/Stambler20170608>

See also Bennett Foddy’s article ‘Enhancing Human Lifespan’ in *Philosophy Now*.

[https://philosophynow.org/issues/91/Enhancing\\_Human\\_Lifespan](https://philosophynow.org/issues/91/Enhancing_Human_Lifespan)