

Ask A Genius 87 – Life and Death (2)
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This session has been edited for clarity and readability.

Scott: Things continue to ramp up, though (Investopedia, 2017; Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015). There's a sense in which the natural development of technology and medicine through better, and better, science makes for a less predictable future, but one in line with the current trend lines of great gains in health span and lifespan (infoplease, 2017; National Institutes of Health: National Institute of Aging, 2015; EBioMedicine, 2015).

Rick: We are on the verge of going from significant, but not readily noticeable, gains in health to really jarring improvements in health and lifespan, where even the World Economic Forum – which is a pretty conservative in its predictions – says the average lifespan in developed nations will rise to 100 (Gratton, 2017).

It is difficult to talk about extended lifespans because the Boomers, which I am one, live most of their lives under not the best medicine, but Boomers were born from 1945 to about 1965 – which means they spent most of their lives in the 20th century with 20th century health patterns (PEW Research Center, 2015).

So, you can talk about lifespans going to 120, but most Boomers aren't going to get to 120 because the technology hasn't been there for them. (Ibid.; The Conversation, 2013; Clark, 2009). But if you talk about a Millennial living until 190, that takes them to the year 2110, by which time science may be able to offer people lifespans of 300.

Scott: The older you are, the less likely you are able to take advantage of the medical and biotechnology waves that will increase health span and lifespan in the future.

Rick: Yes, it's weird. After a certain point, it is weird to talk about specific extended lifespans. Right now, it still makes sense. We're going to have more people living until 100. Some people making it past 120.

It seems to be, if you asked well-informed doctors and scientists, the absolute limit, even with current technology and medicine. But then you ask science fictioney thinking like Aubrey de Grey and Ray Kurzweil, and futurist people, they think there's no reason that we can't break through that barrier and keep going (SENS Research Foundation, 2017; Kurzweil Technologies, 2017).

So, that's the main substitute for life, which is more life, in good condition. You can look at other hypothetical substitutes for life. Like, if you could live forever, but every 50 years you're going to be reset back to age 20, so you get to live from 20-70 – but once you reach 70, then you have no memory of life of 20-70, most people would take that deal.

It would be a frustrating deal. So, you could get some reluctance. Or a hypothetical deal, where you can live forever but can only remember the last 20 years of your life, I think most people would take that deal.

There are all sorts of deals that people can be offered in fantasy movies. There haven't been that many resurrection movies, but many have been popular such as *Heaven Can Wait* being made 3 times, I think.

It is about a guy plucked from heaven based on an administrative error. He files a beef with the divine bureaucracy and gets sent back into other bodies because his body is dead or cremated, or whatever. There are resurrection fantasy movies.

It's easy to explore the landscape of what we value in terms of life and life experience by imagining different hypothetical situations that offer versions of extended life subject to different rules.

You ask people, "Would you like to be resurrected without knowledge of any previous life?" Many people would say, "Yes." Then you have to ask them, "What is exactly being resurrected if you have no knowledge of what came before?" Then they say, "My soul."

So, you have the hypothetical resurrection explorations, which provide a rough indication of what we value about life such as ongoing daily experience. We like being able to remember things we've experienced. We like the things we've accumulated such as wealth, relationships.

These make ongoing daily experience at least have the potential to be pleasurable. We don't like the loss of all experience, all memory, all consciousness, forever. Given that, we can imagine that near and middle future technology will be able to an increasing extent offer substitutes for life.

You can call it extended life, substitutes for life. I think we talked about this in another context, where how much fidelity a reproduction of your mental landscape would have to have for it to be acceptable as a substitute for life or for it to be considered a continuation of your conscious being.

Anyway, we've talked about all of that before. First, crappy ones, then reasonable and acceptable ones, are coming, which goes against the scientific point of view that there is no afterlife because it is not unreasonable to think that there will be technical afterlife.

Maybe, even for people who have died before the era of technical resurrection, they may have left enough information behind for somewhat acceptable simulations of themselves to be created. So, even in a technical universe without divine afterlife, there may be afterlife.

If you left enough of an impact on the world around you, when I think about technical afterlife about people who lived before our era, I think of Jane Austen and Abe Lincoln. They're my go-to examples.

Eventually, you could reproduce those people with greater than 80% fidelity to who they were. Although, you need to define fidelity. You need to reconstruct their genes from their descendants, though the genome isn't that helpful - I estimate it at 5-10% helpful - as well as the verbal record that they left.

You're looking for a deal to be made. If you build a version of Abe Lincoln that experts estimate has 82% fidelity to whatever the real Abe Lincoln was like, his mental landscape was like, if you ask the resurrected or reconstructed thing if this is acceptable, he'd say, "Yes, more or less, I enjoy being alive in the world. I have reservations that I'm actually Abe Lincoln."

Then if you could travel back in time and ask Abe Lincoln, "Do you find that if 200 years in the future that we'd be able to do this deal and be able to reconstruct you with a reasonably high degree of fidelity? Is that something you'd want?"

In an enabling way, he'd say, "That's not entirely sucky, and it's better than nothing." For people who are alive during the era of technical resurrection, who will be able to be offered 80% and then 90% accuracy, even over 98% fidelity once these things become actualized, a level of fidelity which is like as we live and go through life and gain thought and experience, and lose thought and experience as things continue.

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