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**Public Reason and Extension
of Lifespan**

Abstract

The paper is mainly concerned with the problem of whether the question of extension of lifespan may be included in the constitutional essentials (the basic prescriptions) of a well ordered society; either as a right that must be protected, or as a prohibition. More precisely, when put in the terms of a possible prohibition, the question is about whether there are reasons that may be endorsed in the basic legislative institutions of a society, as a matter of the constitutional essentials of a state, as a ground for the prohibition of research or technological practice, with the aim of sensibly extending human lifespan. It may appear as obvious that, if the answer to this question is not positive, freedom to engage in these activities immediately follows. However, this is not true. Even if there is no possibility to establish a prohibition at the level of constitutional essentials, it may still be possible to legislate at lower levels for a prohibition. As a consequence, there is another problem, i.e. the question of whether we may establish, as a matter of constitutional essentials, the right to develop research (for example, by private funds), and make use of technological resources, with the aim of sensibly extending human lifespan. Two kinds of arguments are analysed. The one saying that extension of lifespan is damaging, because it threatens human nature; and the one saying that extension of lifespan is not helpful, because it leads to a life of boredom and tediousness.

Key Words

Enhancement of human capabilities, extension of lifespan, human nature, public reason

The paper is mainly concerned with the problem of whether the question of extension of lifespan may be included in the constitutional essentials (the basic prescriptions) of a well ordered society, either as a right that must be protected, or as a prohibition. More precisely, when put in the terms of a possible prohibition, the question is about whether there are reasons that may be endorsed in the basic legislative institutions of a society, as a matter of the constitutional essentials of a state, as a ground for the prohibition of research, or technological practice, with the aim of sensibly extending human lifespan. It may appear as obvious that, if the answer to this question negative, freedom to engage in these activities immediately follows. However, this is not true. Even if there is no possibility to establish a prohibition at the level of constitutional essentials, it may still be possible to legislate at lower levels for a prohibition, because of less strict constraints in legislation at lower level than at the constitutional level. As a consequence, there is another problem, i.e. the question about whether we may establish, as a matter of constitutional essentials, the right to develop research (for example, by private funds), and make use of technological resources, with the aim of sensibly extending human lifespan. As can be seen, the discussion is concerned with justice; but, focusing on the question of liberties, and not questions of distributive justice,

I restrict the discussion to situations where individuals, or associations, are engaged with their own resources.

I develop the discussion in the context of Rawlsian public reason. As a consequence, the results of my discussion are not definitive, but are only conditional on the acceptance of the model of public reason that, although part of a very influential proposal in contemporary political philosophy, is not accepted by all.

1.

Rawls puts forward a proposal of political philosophy that, in his opinion, is suitable for a pluralistic society where members try to establish a persistent and stable state of social cooperation. The proposal is very sophisticated and takes into consideration numerous elements of a complex society.

First of all, it is worth pointing out that the model of society proposed by Rawls is a liberal society, based on the ideal of free and equal citizens. Let's consider the Rawlsian basic principle of liberty:

“Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all.”¹

The basic liberties specified by Rawls are freedom of political speech, assembly and participation; freedom of thought and conscience; freedom of association; freedom of the person; and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure as associated with the rule of law.²

Let's assume the principle and the specification of basic liberties to be non-problematic as such, and as something we presuppose in the debate. There are still problems of application. First, there is the problem of establishing whether the content of basic liberties is well represented by the description indicated by Rawls. Second, even if we accept this list, these freedoms are abstract, and, therefore, there is still the problem of determining the scope of each of these liberties. We can think about numerous examples that arise in the public debate. Do, for example, some statements on the policy concerning immigrants count as protected by the freedom of political speech, or are they excluded? In what follows in this paper, I will focus on the question of extension of lifespan as something that may be a relevant issue in the applicative definition of a fully adequate scheme of basic rights and liberties.

It is important to distinguish between comprehensive doctrines and political views. Comprehensive doctrines are those that include the full metaphysical and religious premises to which one can appeal in order to find support for a specific moral question. These are highly controversial doctrines in a pluralist society. By contrast, political views are those that can be shared by every reasonable subject in public life (which, in Rawls's terminology, means those public institutions that have the legitimacy to take normative decisions on basic questions of justice). As compared to comprehensive doctrines, political views are less inclusive, but they are a suitable starting point for the debate on which there is consensus. Therefore, the best answer to the fact of pluralism in society is to take as the fundamental legitimate basis of public argumentation that which relates to political views, shared by every reasonable member of society.

How can we proceed in determining the scope of each of the basic liberties? The appropriate model of resolving public questions, at least when they concern the ‘constitutional essentials’, and fundamental questions of justice, is that of public reason. Rawls explains that,

“... in a democratic society public reason is the reason of equal citizens who, as a collective body, exercise final political and coercive power over one another in enacting laws and in amending their constitution”.³

The ideal of public reason holds for citizens who defend their views in the public forum, for members of political parties, candidates in their campaigns, people supporting them, and for people when they vote as well. Public reason corresponds to the liberal principle of legitimacy because, in the public forum, in relation to the constitutional essentials and fundamental questions of justice, the different parties have to explain the basis of their actions to one another in a way that they may reasonably expect others may endorse as not violating of their freedom and equality. In virtue of this requirement, public reason cannot appeal to what may be the whole truth in a situation under discussion. This is something that may be done in different situations where non-public reasons apply and where individuals participate by their free choice: in the context of a scientific association, a church, etc. Public reason also limits the appropriate guidelines of inquiry that specify ways of reasoning and the criteria for the rules of evidence in the public political debate. More precisely, by virtue of the need to respect the liberal principle of legitimacy, public reason says that in the process of justification in public debate people may appeal to beliefs generally accepted and forms of reasoning found in common sense, as well as to conclusions of science when these are not controversial. Clearly, we may not appeal to comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines. In brief, Rawls says that:

“As far as possible, the knowledge and ways of reasoning that ground our affirming the principles of justice and their application to constitutional essentials and basic justice are to rest on the plain truths now widely accepted, or available, to citizens generally.”⁴

When we try to explicate the application of the principle of liberty, the main criterion is that of the protection of basic human interest. A subject is entitled to a liberty as a matter of constitutional essentials if and only if it is related to the protection of the basic human interest; while the basic human interest is the protection, exercise and development of the two moral powers, i.e.: the reasonableness (“Persons are reasonable in one basic aspect when, among equals say, they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so. [...] Reasonable persons, we say, are not moved by the general good as such but desire for its own sake a social world in which they, as free and equal, can cooperate with others on terms all can accept. They insist that reciprocity should hold within that world so that each benefits along with others”),⁵ and the rational (“The rational [...] applies to a unified agent [...] with the powers of deliberation in seeking ends and interests peculiarly its own. The rational applies to how these ends and interests are adopted and affirmed, as well as to how they are given priority. It also applies to the choice of means”).⁶ Members of society have a basic interest in exercising and developing these moral powers. Again, without entering deeply into questions of Rawlsian exegesis, I interpret this as meaning that people have a basic interest in developing the sense of how social cooperation is to be established, as well as the sense of how to live their life in the best way. Or, to put it slightly

1
John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, New York 1993, p. 5.

2
J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p. 291.

3
Ibid., p. 214.

4
Ibid., p. 225.

5
Ibid., pp. 49–50.

6
Ibid., p. 50.

differently, people have a basic interest in developing the sense of how to live a life in the best way, and of how to secure the social conditions for pursuing this life plan.

On the other hand, a prohibition may be established as a matter of constitutional essentials if and only if it is based on basic values that may be endorsed in the public forum. In an example given by Rawls, if we want to establish a prohibition for abortion, we may appeal to the value of the protection of human life and to the value of the ordered reproduction of society. However, we cannot appeal to values that are related to one's comprehensive view, as it may be a religious presupposition.

This is the model that I use in discussing the question of extension of lifespan.

2.

We can approach the question of extension of human lifespan as a considerable extension of what we now consider an average length of life (for example, the possibility to live 300 hundred years), or as virtual immortality (the possibility not to die merely because of ageing).⁷ If we endorse the first approach, we may distinguish between different relations among life stages: life cycle may be stretched out, so that aging is slowed at all stages of life; the process of maturation and the process of ageing are like now, but the period between them is slowed; the decline comes very quickly, and death comes suddenly following years of health and vigor.⁸ In this paper I consider only the prospectives that, intuitively, appear as the most attractive, i.e. virtual immortality and the second and the third of the possibilities I indicated above, as possibilities in the context of a sensible extension of what is now a normal human lifespan. Most of the time, I discuss the possibilities interchangeably, while specifically indicating possible distinctions. Moral assessments are divided at the very basic level and broad approach to the question of the estimation of human enhancement. I will indicate some representative authors from both sides.

Michael Sandel indicates reasons to generally oppose enhancement.⁹ He thinks that the traditionally indicated reasons are not the most relevant that we can use in the debate. Amongst the traditional reasons, there is the argument from safety (for example, using steroids to gain an edge in sports, or cloning techniques to produce a designer child, are troubling because research into improvement is related to possible, or even certain, medical risks),¹⁰ the argument from fairness and non-discrimination (enhancement may be unfair, because of giving underserved advantages to some people); damage to the embryo (enhancement, in particular because of the research it requires, may require damage to embryos that are required for experimentation). Whilst all these reasons can speak against enhancement, they do so in an indirect way: enhancement is opposed not because it is wrong in itself, but because it is related to something morally wrong. Sandel thinks, however, that enhancement is objectionable in itself. He proposes us to think about enhancement in sport, by using of steroids. Let's suppose that they are safe, equally available to all players, and are obtained in a way that is not ethically objectionable. Still, Sandel suggests, correctly, we would oppose enhancement. The reason, as Sandel says in this case and in other cases of enhancement that he judges as morally equivalent, is that we see these practices as diminishing our humanity, or threatening human dignity. But, still the question persists, why? One of the possible answers is that enhancement undermines efforts and erodes human agency. For example, we do not appreciate an athlete who increases

her performance by using steroids, because, in this case, we do not see her achievement as *her* achievement, i.e. as the result of her agency and efforts.

Sandel thinks that even this is not enough. The deepest motive for thinking that these practices diminish our humanity, or threaten human dignity, is that cases of enhancement represent attempts to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. By this, Sandel says, we miss, or even destroy, the gifted character of human powers and achievements:

“To acknowledge the giftedness of life is to recognize that our talents and powers are not wholly our own doing, not even fully ours, despite the efforts we expend to develop and to exercise them. It is also to recognize that not everything in the world is open to any use we may desire or devise. An appreciation of the giftedness of life constrains the Promethean project and conduces to certain humility. It is, in part, a religious sensibility. But its resonance reaches beyond religion.”

A similar thought is expressed by Leon Kass. He says that the traditional worries about enhancement technologies (where he enumerates safeness, justice and freedom) are not the decisive worries. These technologies, in Kass’s opinion, would be ethically dubious even if they were safe, equally available and without coercion.¹¹ Kass, speaking about the prolongation of human lifespan to virtual immortality, says that

“... this is a question in which our very humanity is at stake, not only in the consequences but also in the very meaning of the choice. For to argue that human life would be better without death is, I submit, to argue that human life would be better being something other than human. To be immortal would not be just to continue life as we mortals now know it, only forever. The new immortals, in the decisive sense, would not be like us at all. [...] My question concerns the fact that our finitude, the fact of our mortality – the fact *that we must die*, the fact that a full life for a human being has a biological, built-in limit, one that has evolved as part of our nature.”¹²

7

It is very important to specify what ‘virtual immortality’ is. It does not mean that there will be beings that will never die. The hypothesis is that they will not die merely as a result of a process of ageing. Death may come, for example, as a result of various forms of disease, or violence. This is the reason why Horrobin prefers not to speak about immortality, at all, but only of life extension. See: Steven Horrobin, “Immortality, Human Nature, the Value of Life and the Value of Life Extension”, *Bioethics*, Vol. 20, No. 6, 2006, pp. 286–289. I think, however, that it is useful to distinguish between the specific form of life extension that aims to avoid death because of mere ageing, and other forms of life extension, and this is the reason why I use the expression ‘virtual immortality’ for the former.

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See: President’s Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness. Chapter 4: Ageless Bodies*, www.bioethics.gov/reports/beyondtherapy/chapter4.html.

9

I refer to Michael Sandel, *What’s Wrong with Enhancement*, 2002, www.bioethics.gov/transcripts/dec02/session4.html.

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In relation to extension of human lifespan, there is the discussion about whether this can alter and damage adaptive mechanisms of an organism that, by natural evolution, was primarily focused on the protection of subjects of reproductive age. This alarming hypothesis says that extension of human lifespan may shift deleterious mutations in humans from later to earlier stages of life. For this problem, see the discussion between Walter Glannon, John Harris and Soren Holm. W. Glannon, “Extending Human Lifespan”, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 2002, pp. 339–354; J. Harris, S. Holm, “Extending Human Lifespan and the Precautionary Paradox”, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 2002, pp. 355–368.

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Leon R. Kass, “Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Perfection”, *The New Atlantis* (Spring 2003), Washington, DC.

12

Leon R. Kass, “L’Chain and Its Limits: Why not Immortality?”, *First Things*, 2001, quoted from www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=2188.

Similarly,

“... if there is a case to be made against these activities [activities of prolongation of human lifespan] – for individuals – we sense that it may have something to do with what is natural, or what is humanly dignified or with the attitude that is properly respectful of what is naturally and dignifiedly human”.¹³

However, Kass adds a specification to what Sandel says. It is not that we must appreciate everything given by nature. We must focus on the constitutive features given to our species:

“To turn a man into a cockroach – as we don’t need Kafka to show us – would be dehumanizing. To try to turn a man into more than a man might be so as well. We need more than generalized appreciation for nature’s gifts. We need a particular regard and respect for the special gift that is our own given nature.”¹⁴

The question relevant for this paper is about whether these conservative arguments can function as public reason arguments in the requirement for the prohibition of research and technical activities that may lead to the extension of human lifespan, as a result of human enhancement. Although they appeal to something that may function as a public value, i.e. the protection of human dignity, I must admit, I do not see any power in the arguments, in particular when they are put crudely, as Sandel puts them.

More specifically, I do not see any relation between the main reason indicated for opposing enhancement (diminishing humanity and threat to human dignity) and the explanation given for this in the requirement of a prohibition of technologies of advancement in human lifespan (the appeal to ‘naturalness’ offered by conservatives, as the limit of what we may do). The conservatives are partly correct in saying that we threaten human dignity by neglecting that not everything in the world is open to any use we may desire or devise, and in some cases we threaten human dignity by not recognizing limits to this. There may be cases when enhancement reached by technological means is not appropriate. I think that Kass is partly, limited to certain domains, on the right track when he says that we need to achieve some results by personal efforts in order to make the achievement personal and meaningful.¹⁵ However, in general, and without qualifications, I think that we may clearly assume that we threaten human dignity in cases when we reduce characteristics that are constitutive of human specific prerogatives (primarily, I am thinking of cases of reducing the human capacity to exercise cognitive virtue and to act autonomously; or, in the Rawlsian view, the two moral powers, as well as emotional flourishing). If conservatives want to claim a general point against enhancement, I think that they owe to us an explanation of why enhancement threatens not simply the naturally given features of humanity as such, but, more specifically, the features of humanity that are valuable. While this explanation is missing, there is no public reason to put obstacles to the activities that may improve human lifespan. A mere general appeal to ‘naturalness’ does not get the point, at least, not specifically in relation to ageing. As Horrobin correctly points out, in the absence of specific indications of why enhancement threatens humanity, and with a mere appeal to ‘naturalness’, or the ‘essence’ of humanity, we can only see this as a pretext for a denial of human prerogative in questions of life and death.¹⁶

Arthur Caplan is successful in challenging the appeal to naturalness, by asking what it can possibly mean.¹⁷ According to the first criterion, ageing is natural because it is universal and inevitable. But, many other things such as tooth decay and colds are similarly universal and inevitable, and we do not

attribute them naturalness in any relevant normative sense. According to the second criterion, the naturalness of ageing derives from its function in the biological context of humanity. It may be possible to say that ageing must be seen as the organism's mutational and adaptive response to fluctuating environments. To this, Caplan replies by saying that the real function is represented by the increased metabolic rate that may be advantageous early in life, because it provides the energy required in seeking mates and avoiding predators. This may result in the deterioration of the organism due, for example, to the accumulation of toxic wastes. Ageing, then, does not have any function at all, by itself, but it is just a by-product of selective forces that work to increase the chances of reproductive success.

Steven Horrobin, as well, indicates a valid criticism of the conservative's position, that is, again, partly provisional, in the sense that it tries to understand what exactly the conservatives' point is. Horrobin tries to understand what precisely the conservatives mean by 'natural', as opposed to the unnaturalness of what enhancement does. His first suggestion defines 'natural' as everything that is within space and time. In this sense, humans are natural, and so are their products, like enhancement. His second suggestion defines 'natural' as indicative of the set of things with which humans have not yet interfered, and, therefore, 'unnaturalness' indicates all human interventions. However, if this is the ground to condemn enhancement, too much must be included in the criticism, because everything that humans can ever do would be bad. This is obviously absurd. Moreover, a further question appears: are humans unnatural or are only their actions unnatural? In the first case, it is difficult to understand how humans could arise from the natural world, in the second case it is difficult to understand how it is possible that a being that is wholly natural acts unnaturally.¹⁸

Kass himself is aware that there is a more fundamental question to be asked before that regarding whether the means (technological enhancement) are good, and this is the question about whether some goals (what we aim to obtain by enhancement) are valuable. I will come back to these conservative arguments related specifically to the question of extension of human lifespan.

The liberal replies to conservative arguments that I have already mentioned focused on the misuse of the concept of naturalness, i.e. on the misuse of the

¹³ L. R. Kass, "Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Perfection".

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "In a word, a major trouble with biotechnical (especially mental) 'improvers' is that they produce changes in us by disrupting the normal character of human being-at-work-in-the-world, what Aristotle called *energeia psyches*, activity of soul, which when fine and full constitutes human flourishing. With biotechnical interventions that skip the realm of intelligible meaning, we cannot really own the transformations nor experience them as genuinely our." – L. R. Kass, "Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Perfection".

¹⁶ S. Horrobin, "Immortality, Human Nature, the Value of Life and the Value of Life Extension", pp. 281–286.

¹⁷ Arthur L. Caplan, "Death as an Unnatural Process", *EMBO reports*, supplement 1, 2005, www.nature.com/embor/journal/v6/n1/full/7400435.html.

¹⁸ Steven Horrobin, "The Ethics of Aging Intervention and Life-Extension", in Suresh Rattan (ed.), *Ageing Interventions and Therapies*, World Publishing, Singapore 2005, pp. 11–12, quoted from www.worldscibooks.com/lifesci/etextbook/5690/5690_chap01.pdf. For further discussion about naturalness, see S. Horrobin, "Immortality, Human Nature, the Value of Life and the Value of Life Extension", pp. 282–286.

idea that by enhancement we damage humanity, by damaging what is natural in it, and what is given to it. Although he challenges the conservative's appeal to nature, Nick Bostrom offers a reply to the conservatives that is focused on the misuse of the concept of the special dignity of humanity as something that is expressly worth of preservation.¹⁹ He says that there is no moral fault in the attempt to create future beings enhanced in their capabilities that we may call 'post-human'. Post-human beings can have dignity, as well, and, therefore, nothing of moral relevance would be lost with a wide application of enhancement of human capabilities. Bostrom, in my opinion correctly, questions the concept of 'dignity' endorsed by conservatives, as "a polemical substitute for clear ideas".²⁰ As Bostrom says, dignity may have two different morally relevant meanings, i.e., (a) dignity as the inalienable right to be treated with a basic level of respect; (b) dignity as the quality of being worthy or honourable. There are no reasons why posthumans could not possess it, if it is so defined. The conception of dignity endorsed by Bostrom, in my opinion correctly, does not rely on our causal origin, but on what we are, and on what we have the potential to become, even in consideration of our technological and social context.

To the appeals, such as Sandel's, to what is given to us as humans, Bostrom says that there is no particular reason for a devotion to the 'gifts' of nature, because often what is given by nature are damages and limitations:

"Had Mother Nature been a real parent, she would have been in jail for child abuse and murder."²¹

Because of this, Bostrom says that "rather than deferring to the natural order, transhumanists maintain that we can legitimately reform ourselves and our natures in accordance with human values and personal aspirations".²²

What can Bostrom reply to a more cautious conservative position than Sandel's, as, for example, the position of Kass's that I have described? In virtue of Kass's stance that not everything given by nature is valuable ("Only if there is a human givenness, or a given humanness, that is also good and worth respecting, either as we find it or as it could be perfected without ceasing to be itself, does the 'given' serve as a *positive* guide for choosing what to alter and what to leave alone. Only if there is something precious in the given – beyond the mere fact of its giftedness – does what is given serve as a source of restraint against efforts that would degrade it"),²³ it is not so easy to answer to him, by simply pointing out examples of expressions of cruelty of Mother Nature.

Bostrom does not have any reason to refuse such a general position. In conformity to this, he says that those modifications that would reduce what is valuable in actual human features (as in some dystopia) must be rejected. In general, all the specific fears, exemplified in the criticism of conservatives, are not modifications accepted by transhumanists. What transhumanists really support are modifications that can improve the conditions of human beings, not leaving to chance the life opportunities of subjects:

"If safe and effective alternatives were available, it would be irresponsible to risk starting someone off in life with the misfortune of congenitally diminished basic capacities or an elevated susceptibility to disease."²⁴

Following Bostrom, I do not see how it can be possible to oppose enhancement, if it is directed to the improvement of what represents the major interest in human life, i.e. the preservation, exercise and improvement of the two moral powers. If an extension of human lifespan is helpful in improving the

two moral powers, then it must be welcome. Even if some features that would be surmounted, such as mortality, or a specific lifespan, really are constitutive of humanity (although I am sceptic about this), I do not see any moral force in them, because I do not see any moral force in the preservation of a natural species as such. What really matters are the valuable features in the species, and what really must be protected at the basic legislative level, are the basic interests related to these valuable features. I do not see anything wrong in modifying the species, if this means improving the morally relevant features (in the context of my discussion, this means improving the two moral powers and the conditions for their realization). I am not ready to follow Bostrom in his concept of transhumanism, because of my doubts about the fact that enhancement of human activities implies the concept of transhumanism, or enhancement is only what the expression says – enhancement of *human* capacities. However, I agree with Bostrom’s substantial idea, that improving what is valuable in humanity deserves a positive consideration and it seems to me that even Kass’s last quotation does not appear to contradict this position.

Bostrom also faces the criticisms that appeal to possible future scenarios of dystopia, derived from the usage of technology for modifying human beings. He says that “the claim that this is the *inevitable* consequence of our obtaining technological mastery over human nature is exceedingly pessimistic – and unsupported – if understood as a futuristic prediction, and false as construed as a claim about metaphysical necessity”.²⁵ The best answer to the dystopia anticipated by conservatives is that of supporting a social and political order where modifications are not imposed, but left to the consciences of individuals.

I conclude this part of the paper by saying that if we find any public reasons in opposing enhancement (as we certainly do in some cases), we must reach them in the most traditional range of reasons that Sandel does not consider as the main reasons, or in some other appropriate specification of why enhancement would damage something valuable in human lives. I discuss such proposals later in the paper. I discuss them in the context of the reasons for conservatives’ denial of the liberal requirement that activities for the extension of human lifespan must be protected as part of the definition of basic liberties. This usage of the conservative argument is less strong than the appeal to reasons for forbidding the technologies for extending human lifespan at the level of constitutional essentials. As a consequence, if I am successful in refusing the former ambition, a fortiori, I am also so in refusing the latter.

The question, now, is whether there is power in the claims of authors who not only want for enhancement (and, therefore, extension of human lifespan) to not be forbidden, but put it as a requirement that must be protected as an element of fundamental liberties. John Harris seems to be one of them. He enthusiastically supports enhancement. As he says, enhancement is by defini-

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Nick Bostrom, “In Defence of Posthuman Dignity”, *Bioethics* 19/3 (2005), pp. 212–214.

20
N. Bostrom, “In Defence of Posthuman Dignity”, p. 209.

21
Ibid., p. 211.

22
Ibid., p. 205.

23
L. R. Kass, “Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Perfection”.

24
N. Bostrom, “In Defence of Posthuman Dignity”, p. 212.

25
Ibid., p. 206.

tion a moral duty, it is theoretically and practically inseparable from therapy, and the resistance to it is useless.²⁶ It seems to me that it is possible to translate Harris's statement in the Rawlsian issues by saying that there is reason to protect human enhancement, as well as its instantiation as extension of human lifespan, as a constitutional essential. Is it legitimate to say this? From the Rawlsian standpoint, this is legitimate if and only if the extension of human lifespan is related to the protection, exercise and improvement of the two moral powers that I indicated above.

Is the extension of human lifespan related to the exercise, protection and improvement of the two moral powers? Certainly, we can say this about having a certain extension of lifespan. In general, being alive with a prospective extension of lifespan is the condition for constructing and realizing a lifespan, as well as a stable social cooperation with other beings. There are proposals that have included life extension even among the conditions of personality. For example, Horrobin indicates that between the traditional conditions of personality, as self-consciousness, autonomy and rationality, there is the requirement of a significant extension in time. A subject who lives just one nanosecond would certainly not be a person.²⁷ I am not ready to enter into this discourse as far as the discussion of what it is to be a 'person' is an ontological discussion. However, I find the suggestion relevant as one of the conditions of prospective agency, and, therefore, as a necessary condition related to the two moral powers. A certain extension of lifespan is, therefore, required as a condition for the two moral powers. The question, however, is whether the extension of human lifespan that we are discussing is related to the protection, exercise and improvement of the two moral powers. A famous position, originally formulated by Bernard Williams, denies that extending human lifespan may be of any use to the improvement of anything valuable in human life. I am going to show that this position is, with some qualifications, easily translatable in our Rawlsian discussion.

The problem remarked upon by Williams is that of boredom. In Williams's opinion, this is an inescapable, and not contingent, condition of too long a life. He discusses the question of the fictitious example of Elina Makropoulos. She is a woman with the gift of immortality, which she received at the age of 42. However, after 300 years, she realized that the gift is, in fact, a torture, and, eventually, she decided to terminate her life. As Williams indicates, this was due to the inevitable boredom related to the fact that she has experienced everything it was possible for her to experience; i.e. for a person with a determinate character. After having had some experience, she could only have repetition of the same experiences; for example, of some kinds of personal relationships. It was not possible to have variations in this, because these variations are not admitted by a defined character, whatever that character is.

On the other hand, if one allows the possibility of variation, then another problem appears:

"The problem shifts, to the relation between these varied experiences, and the fixed character: how can it remain fixed, through an endless series of various experiences? The experiences must surely happen to her without really affecting her; she must be, as EM is, detached and withdrawn."²⁸

In brief, either too long a life is a life of tediousness and boredom, or it is a life of variety and novelties, but at the price of lack of character. If this second is the option, then the question appears about why Elina (or anyone else) would want a long or eternal life. What is the interest of planning a long life that is not meaningful from the perspective of the subject? The question appears re-

levant from the standpoint of the Rawlsian criterion that I am endorsing in this paper. We can reformulate it in the relevant terminology and context by saying that either Elina exhausts all the possibilities of development of her moral powers and, then arrives to a stage of only boring repetition of already had experiences, or she can be open to further changes of manifestations of her moral powers. In the latter case, however, it is difficult to understand why she does have an interest in this enterprise. What may appear understandable is that she wants to develop her capacity to structure a life plan, more precisely, a life plan that she finds valuable, and to realize it. What may be her interest in wanting to become a person with a different life plan? Wouldn't this be a lack of herself, rather than an improvement? These were the apparent analogies. However, there is another important disanalogy, that will prove very important, and that I will remark upon later.

Williams discusses a few possible answers that may be endorsed by those supporting the option of meaningful immortality. Among them, one of the most interesting is the idea that, perhaps, intellectual activity can be so absorbing that it may be lastingly valuable, and save one from boredom. However, even here, Williams thinks that there are limitations imposed by one's character, the same as those mentioned more generally earlier. The real freedom is the freedom to develop one's character, and not the desire to be free from it. However, if this is so, then all the dangers of boredom already seen reappear here.

Another possibility discussed by Williams is that of the wish of having a great variety of experiences, engaging in many different things, accumulating in memory. However, Williams says that "one thing that the fantasy has to ignore is the connection, both as cause and as consequence, between having one range of experiences rather than another, and having a character".²⁹ Williams may find support in some statements of the President's Council on Bioethics. The presupposition of those who, as I do, think it is possible to find a long lasting motivation in life, is related to the idea that for this entire time people may find impulses and possibilities to improve. However, it may be possible to say that, in fact, we rarely change our outlooks in our lives, and, therefore, real innovation comes from the changes of generations, and not from maturation and refinement of the same people. Together with the immobility of society, we will have only the tediousness of the virtually immortal, or people with much extended lives.³⁰ Finally, there is the possibility of simply having many successive lives, where the only continuity is that of the body continuity. As it is easy to anticipate, Williams does not see any point in projecting such continuity.

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This is what Harris said in his communication given at the First international workshop on the extension of lifespan, held in Cesano Maderno, September 5th, 2006.

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Steven Horrobin, "The Value of Life and the Value of Life Extension", *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1067 (2006), pp. 94–105.

28

Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1973, p. 90.

29

B. Williams, *Problems of the Self*, p. 94.

30

President's Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*, www.bioethics.gov/reports/beyondtherapy/chapter4.html.

A similar point to that of Williams is told by Kass. He indicates four reasons to prefer mortality to immortality:³¹ living a longer life will not add a proportionately greater enjoyment (playing 25% more games does not give a sensible greater satisfaction to a professional tennis player; seducing 1,250 women, instead of 1,000, does not give greater enjoyment to a Don Juan); although it is remarkable that, as indicated by the President's Council on Bioethics,³² many achievements in our lives are due to the fact that we may plan them in time (and, therefore, are the result not of our finitude, but of our longevity) Kass thinks (as observed also by the President's Council on Bioethics) that our finitude matters, as well – our mortality, the limit of our time, is the ground of taking life seriously and living it passionately; moreover, only a mortal being, aware of the transience of all natural beings, is moved to make beautiful artefacts and objects that will last; moreover, immortals cannot be noble – we obtain the intensity of our character by overcoming fear, many pleasures, etc., are largely connected with survival. To Kass's remarks, we may add the President's Council on Bioethics' observation that an important element of our achievements is represented also by the sense of urgency given to our life by the awareness that our time is limited.³³

What can we say from the perspective of the Rawlsian criterion of interpretation of the adequacy of a liberty in these cases? The arguments appear, again, to be relevant. If the main criterion is that of exercising, protecting and improving one's moral powers, and, specifically, forming and fulfilling a life plan, it appears that there is no point in planning the protection of a life (or successive lives) detached from the personal manifestation of the powers of a subject; specifically, from her structured life plan. The Rawlsian criterion is not related to the preservation of various possible experiences as such, but to the possibility of protecting and improving the moral powers, specifically, the possibility to form and apply a life plan that includes a system of goals and conceptions of good.

What can we reply? First, it is possible to say that there are counterexamples to the thesis that character imposes such strict limits to the possibilities of creative life experiences that the maintenance of character causes boredom in too long a life. Certainly, we have important counterexamples, where we see that major achievements have been obtained exactly because subjects were ready and able to step away from already established tracks. In my town, in the Rijeka theatre, we have classicistic frescos by Gustav Klimt, nothing even resembling the pictures for which he is notorious. People who love jazz know the change of forms of creativity and all the innovations introduced by Miles Davis. Partly, his magnitude derives from this capacity. As a consequence, we may say that there is no reason to establish it as a rule that the individual creativity is as limited as Williams (as well as the President's Council on Bioethics) says. Perhaps, we may say that people tend to be immobilized in their outlooks, or in their domain, or their enterprises, just because they think that they do not have time to successfully engage in various life achievements, or to be successful in innovative enterprises, after a specific time in their life. They are immobilized by the absence of enough time, and, for them, from this standpoint, life extension can be strongly beneficial.³⁴

I have described the point mainly by relying on examples. Now I dedicate a few words to explicate the position, principally by remarking the differences between Williams's and Rawls's understanding of the possible development of a subject. The basic Rawlsian idea may be described by saying that "the construction of a human personality could assume an open-ended nature".³⁵

As we saw, Williams's concept of character is rather static: the character determines the limits of one's development by establishing the borderlines and directions of one's development, which are rather easily reached. However, Rawls's idea of exercising, protecting and developing the two moral powers is open to variety and revisions. We can illustrate this in two steps. As regarding the first, we may remark the more extended variety of goals in one's life, than seems to be assumed by Williams when he denies that a considerable extension of lifespan is valuable (this denial seems to me implicit in his position, although his explicit polemic target is represented only by immortality; in any case, this is a relevant point for the conservatives who oppose sensible extension of lifespan, and assume Williams in their support). Here, some considerations of Steven Horrobin are relevant. He remarks on the prospective nature of personality, that is not only determined by backward elements, such as experience and memory, but also by forward-looking complements, such as hopes, plans, and so on. Williams can still partly follow Horrobin in this definition of personality, by the remark that what partly defines personality is its forward-looking element. However, he would disagree with Horrobin's further point that this forward-looking element of personality determines that there is no point in time at which the continuation of a person's life may be said not to be valuable. We have already seen William's reasons. What are the reasons Horrobin takes in support of his claim? As Horrobin says:

"That my desires, hopes, and plan may fix upon particular objectives does not in itself seem to suggest that I can easily, or at all, fix these elements of myself purely upon and continent within some set of particular objectives, so that they end with the completion of this set. [...] A person whose self-professed sole hope, desire, and plan in life was to stand atop Mount Everest is nonetheless likely to find himself filled with some other such goal by the time he has reached the bottom again, or indeed to discover that he already had many in store, which had merely been obscured by this overriding one."³⁶

So, contrary to Williams, Horrobin remarks the variety of aspirations that we may have in our life. This is, still, not an explicit denial of the central aspect of Williams's position. Williams can accept this, by, nevertheless, remarking that there are still limits set by the character of a person for the variety of one's goals. Indeed, Horrobin thinks that the forward-looking aspect of personality, contrary to what Williams thinks, renders it absurd to think that there is a point after which the prosecution of human life cannot be meaningful. Horrobin thinks that this appears as absurd at the same moment when we clearly imagine such a thought:

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Although I show and discuss here these arguments, some of them may not only deny the right, as an expression of a fundamental liberty, to procedures of life extension, but establish also the stronger ambition of constituting a basis for their prohibition as a matter of constitutional essentials.

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President's Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*, www.bioethics.gov/reports/beyondtherapy/chapter4.html.

33

See *ibid.*

34

Cfr. Steven Horrobin, "The Ethics of Aging Intervention and Life-Extension", p. 17.

35

John Schloendorn, "Making the Case for Human Life Extension: Personal Arguments", *Bioethics*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 2006, p. 202.

36

S. Horrobin, "The Ethics of Aging Intervention and Life-Extension", p. 7, quoted from www.worldscibooks.com/lifesci/etextbook/5690/5690_chap01.pdf.

“Try to imagine a person setting a particular date beyond which she will be free of *all* desires. Such a picture strikes one as absurd.”³⁷

However, Williams’ point is not clearly reproduced by this quotation. Although it is absurd that a subject thinks that there will be a date when she will be free of all her desires, this moment may, nevertheless, come, as in the case of Elina Makropoulos. It may come very late, if a person has a wide and rich set of desires and goals, so that a sensible extension of her life is meaningful. But, Williams says, if a subject has permanent and stable desires, a day will come when she will have satisfied her potentialities, and her life will become just a tedious sequence of repetitions, like in Elina’s case. The fact that we can imagine Elina as a possibility confirms the plausibility of Williams’s hypothesis.

However, a relevant fact is that we cannot say in advance when this moment will come, in particular, we cannot establish the same moment for all persons. In consideration of this, we may say that the optimal extension of a life is subjective.³⁸ Even assuming that there is a moment when boredom would be inescapable, we cannot anticipate when this moment will arrive, and, as I say, this varies from individual to individual. There may be individuals with rather simple life plans, or a rudimentarily developed character, that can be bored very early in their life. For them, even the actual length of human life may be nonsensical.³⁹ On the other hand, there may be demanding life plans, and they require much more than the actual length of human life for complete accomplishment. A life plan dedicated to intellectual activity may certainly be such a life plan, in consideration of the wide range of elements that constitute intellectual development and the accomplishment of an intellectual enterprise (consider the various expressions of science and the arts, especially where they are interconnected in interdisciplinarity).

We may also say that how much one is attached to her life project is relevant. If one is very much attached to one’s life project, then she can find a more extended enjoyment in it. As a consequence, even if Williams were successful in showing that immortality is not a good for human beings, he has not shown that a sensible extension of human life is not a great good for at least some human beings, and, that, as Horrobin has shown, nobody can say in anticipation when the moment will come when her life will be nonsensical. However, if it is not possible to determine in advance at what time the life plan of an individual is exhausted, it appears to be good to give her as much opportunity as possible, i.e. as much extension of lifespan as possible (inclusive of virtual immortality), leaving to her the decision if she wants to terminate her life later.

We can even strengthen this thesis by considering the possibility relevant for Rawls of improvement of the two moral powers, and not only their protection and exercise. This possibility not only supports the idea, against Williams, that extension of human lifespan can meaningfully be very much extended (as follows from Horrobin’s consideration about the wide range of human interests in a single life), but, also, that it may be meaningfully indefinitely extended, as much as we can think that the improvement of the two moral powers can last permanently, and, even, never be fully accomplished. I related this possibility to Rawls, but it is compatible with Horrobin’s position, and, perhaps, even suggested by him,⁴⁰ although Horrobin’s focus is not on the possibility to improve and change one’s life plan, but on the multiplicity of goals and interests that already constitute the prospective of an agent. A character does not need to be fixed, and goals need not to be determined at a

single point in the life. Character and goals may be revisable and improvable. As Rawls says, the two moral powers consist also in the ability to revise them, and improve them. As a consequence, contrary to what Williams says, virtual immortality can be an attractive option for some human beings, most of all for those most interested in the nurture of their two moral powers.

Before ending the discussion, there is, however, another problem to face. It is represented by an argument that has the same goal as Williams, but with another strategy. As we saw, Williams's strategy consisted on the focus on character, as the limiting factor of how much time it is meaningful to live. The other possibility is to focus on the capacity to memorize, as the limiting factor of how much time it is meaningful to live. As Walter Glannon says:

“When we reflect on the desirability of a longer life, it is the continued conscious life of a person that we have in mind, not the mere continued biological functioning of a human organism.”⁴¹

However, the continuity of conscious life, that means exactly what Horrobin indicates by the interrelation in personality between backward-looking elements, as memories, and forward-looking elements, as plans, is compromised, because of the limits of human minds. Due to evolutionary reasons, Glannon says, memory is designed in such a way as to support the survival of organisms until reproductive age. To this end, there is an equilibrium between what we can remember from the past, and what can we project in the future: too many memories would render difficult to learn new things and anticipate events in the future, while anticipations too much extended into the future would undermine memory of the past. As a consequence, there are limits between what we can anticipate in the future, and remember from the past. As Glannon says, the fate of a subject living for a too extended time will be a divergence between the biological and the psychological life. This is the reason why we can sustain our interest in projects just for a limited period of time. The same argument may compromise also the one based on the Rawlsian interest in exercising, protecting and developing the two moral powers. It seems that there is a limit to how much we can plan to improve and exercise the two moral powers, specifically in the manifestation of projecting a conception of good life, more precisely, the limit of our minds in anticipating the future and remembering the past. As Glannon says,

“For my concern about completing the project to be rational, there must be a unity or integration of the mental states of the desire and intention at the earlier time and the mental state of remembering my earlier desire and intention at the later time. [...] But if the connection between my earlier desire and later memory weakens as the length of time between these mental states increases, to the point where I no longer identify with the desire or its content, then it seems to

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S. Horrobin, “The Value of Life and the Value of Life Extension”, p. 103.

38

Cfr. John Harris, “Immortal Ethics”, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1019 (2004), pp. 530–531.

39

This is a possible suggestion even for describing Elina Makropolous, as Horrobin does when he, similarly to a suggestion by Harris related to boredom and immortality, says that she “was bored essentially because she was

boring”. S. Horrobin, “The Ethics of Aging Intervention and Life-Extension”, p. 17.

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“Who I am now is very nearly in no way at all who I was when I was three, twelve, fifteen, etc. or who I will be when I am eighty”. See: S. Horrobin, “The Ethics of Aging Intervention and Life-Extension”, p. 19.

41

Walter Glannon, “Identity, Prudential Concern, and Extended Lives”, *Bioethics* 16 (2002), p. 271.

follow that my concern about the project, and the rational basis for it, can extend only so far into the future.”⁴²

The first possibility of replying to Glannon consists in the denial that there are such limits to the equilibrium of memory and anticipations, as he indicates. Harris remarks that Glannon’s discussion on this point is speculative.⁴³ Glannon, on the other hand, insists in saying that the position is empirically well supported.⁴⁴ I do not enter into the discussion, and I will assume Glannon’s position about the limits of the equilibrium between past memories and future plans. In particular, I assume that there is a moment when a subject forgets all the past memories of some earlier periods of her life. What consequences does it have for the question of lifespan in the context of the Rawlsian project?

I think that we may again reply in Horrobin’s fashion, by facing two possibilities. In the first possibility, we cannot anticipate when it comes to be the moment when a subject, by her biological limits, forgets the past moments of some earlier stages of her life, i.e. when the equilibrium between past memories and future projects is compromised. If it is not possible to establish this moment, then it is not possible to establish in advance how much life extension is desirable. As a consequence, it is rational to desire an unlimited life extension, otherwise one would risk that her life terminates before her life projectuality is compromised. It appears as rational that one does not to want to terminate her life before her projectuality is consumed. Glannon might reply by indicating a possible undesirable occurrence that may appear if the subject survives the moment when her life projectuality (in the sense of a connectedness between past memories and future projects) is compromised. The prospective of this occurrence might override the rational desire not to terminate the life before the projectuality is consumed. But what can this possible undesirable consequence be? I do not see any rational expectation that may ground the hypothesis of such occurrence. On the contrary, I see a rational expectation that speaks against Glannon’s stance. I am going to show this, now.

We may assume, as Glannon, that, after a certain moment in the biological life, the person is no longer the same person that existed once, when her life project, inspired by a concept of good, was formulated. Still, I do not see why this is an undesirable occurrence. Even if we assume that we have a new person, this is an event that may only be welcome from the standpoint of the previous person. The previous person had a concept of good, and a life project, motivated by her two rational powers. Obviously, she thinks that this life project and concept of good is worth preserving. It appears that the new person that comes is a very reliable candidate for pursuing this life project and concept of good. Even if she forgets the memories of earlier stages of her life, she still has the memories of the immediate past. Among these memories, there are certainly those relevant for her life project and concept of good: it is still active in the limited part of her memories that are related to the relevant aspects of the former life plan. Let’s show by an example. Imagine a person engaged in a life project related to a concept of good. At time T she realized the first achievements of her project. At T_x she improved the achievements, basing the improvement on the achievements at T, although she forgot some of the things she knew at T. At T_y she further improved the achievements, basing the improvement on earlier achievements, although she forgot part of the achievements at T_x , and more of the achievements of T. At T_z she further improved her achievements, basing the improvement on all previous results, although she forgot everything about T.

Let's assume, for the sake of Glannon's argument, that here there is no continuity between the person at T and the person at T_z . Still, we may say that the person at T is rationally motivated to want the person at T_z to live, because the person at T_z is very well equipped to pursue the life project and concept of good supported by the person at T, in virtue of the knowledge and ability she brings with her with the memories from T_x and T_y . The attitude of the person at T toward the person at T_z that we may rationally expect is the same as that of a teacher toward her disciples, or that of a grandmother who founded an important corporation toward her heiresses, i.e. the persons that may pursue the existence and further development of the corporation.

Because of this reason we may easily say that extension of lifespan is rationally desirable even if, contrary to my first hypothesis, we can anticipate how much an equilibrium between past memories and forward-looking plans can survive.

3.

One argument that certainly may appear as a valid public reason is that of global overpopulation, although there are authors that are skeptic toward this claim. Horrobin, for example, says that actual experience indicates that the overpopulated countries are those of shorter, and not those of longer longevity.⁴⁵ However, even if we assume that overpopulation is a serious problem, it must be evaluated by taking into account several considerations. First of all, there is the consideration of balancing two possible different requirements, i.e. the requirement of life extension, and the requirement to procreate. Although we may say that there is still room to increase the population in the world, if we accept and realize both an unconditioned right to life extension (or a right to limited but sensible life extension), and an unconditioned right to procreate, the world will possibly arrive in a condition of overpopulation. In this conflict of rights it may appear as obvious to many that we must renounce to the right to life extension. But the answer is not so obvious.

First, we may consider the problem from the perspective of the individual's choice. It is possible to put a condition to an individual that if she requires a prolongation of lifespan, then she is not permitted to procreate. It is not obvious that there is a reason established in advance, and independent of the decision of each single person, that procreation has to be preferred over extension of lifespan.

Second, we may put the problem from the perspective of interpersonal relationships. It may be that, even if subjects who decide to extend their lifespan do not procreate, there is, nevertheless, the danger of overpopulation because of their decision to extend their lifespan together with the decision of other subjects to procreate. However, in this case it is not so clear in advance that the unconditioned right to procreate of some individuals is stronger than the right of other individuals to extend their lifespan.

One solution is that of the regulation of the right to procreate by the exclusion from this right of those who require life extension, and the limitations of the right of reproduction among others, so that, for example, two persons may not have more than two descendants. Although this is a grave interference

42
W. Glannon, "Identity, Prudential Concern, and Extended Lives", p. 278.

43
John Harris, "Reply to Glannon", *Bioethics* 16 (2002), p. 285.

44
Walter Glannon, "Reply to Harris", *Bioethics* 16 (2002), p. 293.

45
S. Horrobin, "The Ethics of Aging Intervention and Life-Extension", pp. 12–13.

with a person's right and integrity, and the practical solution requires a careful and sensible approach, it may represent a possible solution of equilibrium between the right to life extension of some people and the right to reproduction of other people, that I assume both as relating to the exercise of the two moral powers. The most obvious complaint may come from those who refuse the separation of sex and reproduction. However, these people themselves, typically, declare the option of abstinence, if this is required because of higher values, and, therefore, I think that we may legitimately assume this option for them, in this case.

In any event, the problem of overpopulation will appear very late, if it will ever appear (as we have seen, for example, Horrobin is skeptical about this). For this reason, it is not proper to take the problem as a ground for forbidding now the research and the application of the procedures. As we have seen, the question is related to an equilibrium of requirements that is very difficult to interpret, because we cannot know today what will be the value of life extension, or reproduction, in a world modified by the possibility of sensible life extension, if not even of virtual immortality. It is a proper policy to permit the process to start, and to carefully estimate its developments and consequences, in order to adjust correctives, or make decisions in accordance with what happens in the process, or of what appear to be reliable forecasts of further results in any stage of the process, when there are reasonable grounds for these predictions.

Before ending the discussion, I show a different way of approaching the problem. The focus, now, is not on the assessment and the mutual assessment of the right to life and the right to procreate, but, on the desirability of a world without changes of generations. As Kass says,

“... what would the relations between the generations be like if there never came a point at which a son surpassed his father in strength or vigor? What incentive would there be for the old to make way for the young, if the old slowed down little and had no reason to think of retiring – if Michael could play until he were not forty but eighty? [...] One cannot think of enhancing the vitality of the old without retarding the maturation of the young.”⁴⁶

Kass here speaks about the stage when we still have some new people entering the society, i.e. the reproductive process is still active. We can imagine a problem even more radical, although as a result of a very long and distant process. The problem is that of a society where reproduction is almost excluded.

Here, at least two problems appear. The first is that of a society without reproduction, where the question is represented by the possible tediousness of a society with always the same people. Partly the problem is related to the possibility of the absence of new ideas, innovations, and creative expressive forms. I already discussed this problem, and I have said that there is no reason to exclude that people can change in the creativity of their life, and that there are already examples of this (moreover, I think that some people do not make changes in the expression of their creativity, or in their lifestyle, just because they think that they do not have enough time to become successful in a new form of creativity). Moreover, we may be skeptical of the idea that new ideas are always better than old. Many ideas that appeared to be new at first glance were assessed, later, as simple variations on models already known. In this sense, experience can even be helpful to recognize which ideas are really innovative.⁴⁷

Partly, the problem is related to the possible boredom of always living with the same people. Even this is not a problem that has the strength of necessity.

Some people can enjoy very much living together, as some long standing loves, or friendships show, or, as is shown by how much we miss some people that we have lost. However, it is also true that for some people generational immobility can be a problem. These people always have the opportunity left open to Elina Makropoulos: to terminate their life. There is no reason to avoid a longer life, or virtual immortality, before even having seen whether it is, and how long it is desirable, which every person must assess for herself.

The second problem is related to a society where there is reproduction, but also people in any generation (or, at least, some people) live much longer than happens now. The main question is that of intergenerational justice, i.e. the reduced possibilities of new generations, with older generations not ready to leave positions wished for by many. I do not see here a problem of justice, if only the new generations are not discriminated against. As Arthur Caplan says,

“... we may need policies to ensure that a fair proportion of resources are devoted to the young, that seniority on the job does not become stasis in the workplace. [...] But there is no empirical evidence to suppose that we cannot do so in ways that make longer life enjoyable, productive and meaningful”.⁴⁸

As we can see from the case of Michael Jordan mentioned by Kass, there is no injustice if a new, younger, player can participate in the competition with fair opportunities. True, there would be reduced chances of being successful for a young player, with a permanent rival such as Michael Jordan; but I cannot see as a rule of justice the idea that one may be helped, in reaching success, by the elimination of rivals.

Elvio Baccarini

Javni um i produžetak trajanja života

Sažetak

Tekst se bavi problemom može li produžetak trajanja ljudskog života biti uključen u ustavna temeljna pitanja dobro uređenog društva, bilo kao pravo koje treba biti zaštićeno, ili kao zabrana. Kada govorimo o mogućoj zabrani, pitanje je postoje li razlozi na koje je moguće pozvati se u temeljnim zakonodavnim ustanovama društva, kao osnovu za zabranu istraživanja, ili tehnološke prakse, u cilju značajnog produžetka trajanja ljudskog života. Može se činiti očitim da, ako ne postoji pozitivan odgovor na to pitanje, zabrana ovih aktivnosti slijedi neposredno. Međutim, to nije ispravno. Čak i ako nije moguće uspostaviti zabranu na razini ustavnih temeljnih pitanja, može biti još uvijek moguće odrediti zakone na nižim razinama zakonodavstva. Kao posljedica, pojavljuje se novi problem – možemo li odrediti, među temeljnim ustavnim pitanjima, pravo na razvijanje istraživanja (na primjer, privatnim fondovima) i na korištenje tehnoloških resursa, u cilju značajnog produžetka trajanja ljudskog života.

Analiziraju se dvije vrste argumenta. Jedan od njih kaže da je produžetak trajanja ljudskog života štetan, budući da ugrožava ljudsku prirodu, a drugi kaže da produžetak trajanja ljudskog života nije koristan, s obzirom da vodi do besmislenosti i dosade.

Ključne riječi

Unapređenje ljudskih sposobnosti, produžetak trajanja života, ljudska priroda, javni um

46

See: L. R. Kass, “Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Perfection”.

47

S. Horrobin, “The Ethics of Aging Intervention and Life-Extension”, p. 22.

48

A. L. Caplan, “Death as an Unnatural Process”.

Elvio Baccarini

Öffentliche Vernunft und Verlängerung der Lebenszeit

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, ob die Verlängerung der Lebenszeit zu den in der Verfassung einer gut eingerichteten Gesellschaft verankerten Grundfragen gehört, sei es als schutzwürdiges Recht oder aber als Verbot. Der letztere Fall bezieht sich auf die Frage, ob es Umstände gebe, die von gesetzgebenden gesellschaftlichen Grundeinrichtungen ins Feld geführt werden könnten, um ein Verbot von Forschungen oder bestimmten technologischen Praktiken, die das Ziel einer wesentlichen Lebenszeitverlängerung verfolgen, durchzusetzen. Es mag als offenkundig erscheinen, dass entsprechende Verbote auf unmittelbarem Wege bewirkt werden, wenn eine positive Antwort auf die gestellte Frage ausbleibt. Dies ist jedoch nicht der Fall. Selbst wenn auf verfassungsrechtlicher Ebene kein Verbot erreicht werden kann, ist es immer noch möglich, entsprechende gesetzliche Regelungen auf tieferer Ebene festzulegen.

In der Folge ergibt sich ein neues Problem: Ist es möglich, unter anderen in der Verfassung zu verankernden Grundfragen, ein Recht auf die Entwicklung wissenschaftlicher Forschung zu bestimmen (finanziert beispielsweise aus Privatfonds), ferner ein Recht auf die Nutzung technologischer Ressourcen mit dem Ziel, die Lebensdauer des Menschen wesentlich zu verlängern? Es werden zwei Arten von Argumenten analysiert. Die erste Argumentationsweise besagt, dass die Verlängerung der Lebenszeit schädlich sei, da sie die Natur des Menschen gefährde. Laut zweiter Argumentationsweise ist eine Verlängerung der menschlichen Lebenszeit nutzlos, da sie in Sinnlosigkeit und Langweile führe.

Schlüsselbegriffe

Förderung menschlicher Fähigkeiten, Lebensverlängerung, menschliche Natur, öffentliche Vernunft

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La raison publique et l'allongement de l'espérance de vie

Résumé

L'article se penche sur la question de savoir si l'allongement de l'espérance de vie peut faire partie des principes de base de la constitution d'une société bien ordonnée, que ce soit en tant que droit à protéger ou en tant qu'interdit. Plus précisément, si on décide de l'interdire, la question est de savoir s'il existe des fondements sur lesquels puisse s'appuyer une interdiction de recherches scientifiques ou technologiques qui visent à allonger sensiblement l'espérance de vie, dans les institutions législatives fondamentales d'une société, et avec l'idée d'en faire un principe constitutionnel de l'Etat. Il pourrait sembler évident que, si la réponse à cette question n'est pas positive, la liberté de s'engager dans de telles activités en découle. Néanmoins, cela n'est pas vrai. Même s'il n'y a pas de possibilité d'établir une telle interdiction au niveau constitutionnel, il est toujours possible de légiférer à un niveau inférieur. En conséquence se pose un autre problème, celui de savoir si l'on peut inscrire, dans les fondements de la constitution, le droit de développer la recherche, financée par exemple par des fonds privés, et utiliser les ressources technologiques dans le dessein d'allonger sensiblement l'espérance de la vie humaine. Deux types d'arguments sont analysés. L'un avance que l'allongement de l'espérance de vie est dangereux car il compromet l'essence même de l'humanité. L'autre estime que l'allongement de l'espérance de vie n'est pas utile car il aurait pour résultat une vie ennuyeuse et monotone.

Mots-clés

Amélioration, allongement de l'espérance de vie, nature humaine, raison publique