MOTION:

“ATTEMPTS TO EXTEND RADICALLY THE HUMAN LIFESPAN SHOULD BE WELcomed NOT FEARED”
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If you had been born just 150 years ago, your life expectancy would have been 40 years. It has doubled in the developed world since then to around 80, and continues to rise. The main causes of this change are improvements in public sanitation, nutrition and healthcare. While it is to be welcomed, the progressive extension in life expectancy raises a number of practical and moral issues. For example, there is the cost of care and treatment: half of the medical expenses incurred on behalf of the average person are spent in his or her senior years [Ref: NCBI]. Then there is the rising cost of pensions: will pension funds, both public and private, remain solvent if they must pay out to each pensioner for longer? [Ref: BBC News]. On the ethical side, there are a range of questions such as the desirability of living for living’s sake, on ‘making room’ for the younger generations, and on death giving meaning to life. Humans have always been interested in immortality, and in extending life – or, more usually, extending youth. Scientists are looking at ways to increase dramatically the rate at which lifespans have already been rising, thereby amplifying the issues that longer lives already present.

Already, apparent progress has been made in mice [Ref: New Scientist]. As a society, we need to think about how desirable this is. Who pays for the research and associated healthcare? Is extending lifespan a valid focus for healthcare systems that are already struggling to cope with demand, with competing claims for the time and resources of doctors, beds and researchers? Should we grow old gracefully, or put our individual and collective efforts into delaying death? If life and health are good things, then shouldn’t the aim to have more of both trump other concerns? These are not merely economic questions, but moral and existential ones, too.
**Frankengran?**

As well as simply extending our lifespans, there is the question of how much we can extend so called ‘healthy life expectancy’ - the period we can expect to live free of illness. In the UK, this currently stands at about 46 years for men and about 67 years for women [Ref: Guardian]. In other words, we need to consider questions about the quantity and the quality of life. We want, if we want it at all, to be younger for longer, not old for longer. As recent concern about rising levels of dementia illustrates, could we end up with nightmare scenarios of almost indestructible bodies with all the parts replaced, but the minds within them gone? Even if you could replace all the parts over time, could the mind cope? The debate, therefore, is not just about the steady rise in life expectancy and the issues surrounding that, but more specifically about whether or not to welcome scientific attempts to extend radically natural lifespan. Ethical, moral and religious concerns are crucial in this debate. Many people consider that it is death that gives meaning to life, that one has an allotted time, that we should respect the natural cycle and not be greedy for life, time and resources. Some argue that older people be prepared to ‘make room’ for younger generations – a ‘duty to die’ [Ref: BBC]. Others disagree and think that the quality, purpose or value of their lives is not for others to decide – if the technology is available to get more years out of life, then they want the freedom and funding to pursue it. Is the attempt to extend radically our lifespans simply just the next, logical step beyond a ‘diet and exercise’ approach to living longer?

**Scientific Approaches**

We age because our bodies have limited capacities to renew themselves. [Ref: Sage]. Research into how to escape this reality and radically extend life seems to take three broad forms: ‘compressed morbidity’ (pushing the stage of serious ill-health and frailty right to the end of life); ‘decelerated ageing’ (slowing the ageing process); and ‘arrested ageing’. This last is the most radical and aims to ‘cure’ ageing and to achieve radical life extension. The tools include the use of genetic manipulation, stem cells and biomechanical devices. Some of the claims and predictions made by scientists and futurologists in this regard are thought to be impossible hype – with some arguing that we may have already reached maximum life expectancy [Ref: The Rational Optimist], but they still offer a challenge to our acceptance of ageing.

**Who pays?**

Science will find what’s possible, and people who want it and can afford it will buy the drugs/procedures/transplants deemed effective. And in a free world, supporters would argue, why not? They consider it wonderful, not alarming. The point of this debate is not to discuss what is possible scientifically, but how as a society we should greet such developments - what we should fund, what we should prioritise. It’s an existential and ethical question, as well as an economic one. Will future generations thank us for saddling them with open-ended welfare and care bills? And will the technology only be available to the rich, leading to another source of inequality? Life, the saying goes, is certainly more appealing than the alternatives. But before applauding and signing up to the super-sized portion of life promised by some scientists, there is much to consider.
**FOR**

**Why We Should Look Forward to Living to 120 and Beyond**
Alex Zhavoronkov *nextavenue* 3 October 2013

**Google’s Calico: the War on Aging Has Truly Begun**
Aubrey de Grey *TIME* 18 September 2013

**Radical Life Extension Is Already Here, But We’re Doing it Wrong**
Ross Anderson *Atlantic* May 2012

**Living to 100 and Beyond**
Sonia Arrison *Wall Street Journal* 27 August 2011

**AGAINST**

**On Dying After Your Time**
Daniel Callahan *New York Times* 30 November 2013

**Do You Want to Be Immortal? Really?**
George M. Young *Huffington Post* 1 August 2012

**Immortality may beckon, but who wants to live forever?**
Bryony Gordon *Telegraph* 23 September 2009

**Three Arguments Against Extending the Human lifespan**
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**IN DEPTH**

**Why do our bodies grow old?**
*Sage* 2012

**Would doubling the human lifespan be a net positive or negative for us?**
Gregory B Stock vs Daniel Callahan *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* January 2005

**ORGANISATIONS**

- Alliance for Aging Research
- British Society of Gerontology
- Fight Aging
- Immortality Institute
- Institute for Ageing and Health (IAH)
- International Longevity Centre UK
- Medical Research Council
- National Institute on Aging
- Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senescence (SENS)
- The Oxford Institute of Population Ageing
DEBATING MATTERS

TOPIC GUIDES

AGEING:
“Attempts to extend radically the human lifespan should be welcomed not feared”

BACKGROUNDERs

How Japan stood up to old age
David Pilling FT Magazine 17 January 2014

Undoing aging: Aubrey de Grey
TEDxTalks December 2013

Prof Tom Kirkwood on Ageing
The Astellas Innovation Debate 6 November 2013

Why are there so few people over 115 years of age? (One)
Matt Ridley The Rational Optimist Blog 22 September 2013

Fear of Immortality
Will Saletan Slate 6 August 2013

Where are the missing 90-year-olds?
Ruth Alexander BBC 2 July 2013

Life expectancy is increasing, but so are social divides
Christine Broughan Guardian 9 July 2012

We DON’T want to live forever: a growing movement believe we shouldn’t obsess over life expectancy
Rob Waugh Daily Mail 22 May 2012

Cost of care and geriatric medicine
British Geriatrics Society 24 October 2010

Migration vs ageing population - a tricky trade-off
BBC News 19 November 2009

Older people are more than ‘food for worms’
Brendan O’Neill spiked 23 July 2009

The ageing revolution
BBC News

The ethics of life-extension
Edmonton Aging Symposium March 2007

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Leon R. Kass Washington Post 29 September 2005

The science of ageing and anti-ageing
Halldór Stefánsson EMBO Reports July 2005

Who wants to live forever?
Jayne C Lucke and Wayne Hall EMBO Reports February 2005

‘We will be able to live to 1,000’
Aubrey de Grey BBC News December 2004

‘Don’t fall for the cult of immortality’
S Jay Olshansky BBC News December 2004

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Berhanu Alemayehu and Kenneth E Warner Health Services Research June 2004

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Reith Lectures BBC Radio 4 2001

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Wellcome Trust

Is there a duty to die?
BBC
IN THE NEWS

Ageing reversed as scientists discover how to turn clock back in mammals
*Telegraph* 20 December 2013

Turning back time: ageing reversed in mice
*New Scientist* 19 December 2013

Could humans live to 500 years old?
*Daily Mail* 13 December 2013

NHS faces ‘bankruptcy’ over ageing population
*Telegraph* 17 October 2013

Live to 120? Most say ‘no thanks’, poll finds
*NBC* 6 August 2013

Britain needs millions more immigrants to reduce strain of ageing population
*Telegraph* 17 July 2013

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*Guardian* 24 February 2013

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*Channel 4 News* 9 January 2013

UK healthy life expectancy rises to nearly 64 for men
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Dementia cases worldwide to triple by 2050
*NBC* 11 April 2012

Harvard scientists reverse the ageing process in mice – now for humans
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Ageing populations and fewer workers strain pensions
*BBC News* 14 September 2010

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*BBC News* 2 October 2009

Map charts UK’s ageing population
*BBC News* 1 October 2009

Aging population heralds rise of the ‘supercentenarian’
*Daily Telegraph* 30 September 2009

UK retirement age could rise to 70
*The Times* 8 August 2009

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*Guardian* 20 July 2009

Britain’s ageing population ‘as big a threat as climate change’
*Daily Telegraph* 29 May 2008

Cameron sees ‘ageing UK’ benefits
*BBC News* October 2006

Politicians urged to face up to demographic timebomb
*Guardian* October 2006

AGEING:
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