

Opposition to Life Extension Is Based on Myths

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Most people who object to extending the human lifespan by curing aging base their objections on myths and misinformation. Aging is neither inevitable nor universal, and it is not necessarily true that a shorter life is more precious. Modern science will make it possible to extend good health as well as life. Although not everyone in the world will be able to benefit equally from anti-aging technologies, these disparities are not sufficient reason to withhold their development and use. Populations that live longer would be economically profitable because people would work more years and remain healthier longer than they now do. Curing aging would reshape society, but there is no reason to think that would be a negative thing. Overpopulation remains a serious consideration but it is one that can be thoughtfully addressed.

Aging fosters sickness and disability, increases human suffering, and makes us more likely to die. Yet there are a number of possible objections to the endeavor of curing aging. Most of these are unfounded myths and hence easy to disprove. This essay draws on my own lectures on the subject and attempts to answer the most commonly raised questions and concerns about a possible cure for aging and the work of gerontologists.

João Pedro de Magalhães, "Should We Cure Aging?" Senescence.info, 2004. <http://www.senescence.info>. Reproduced by permission.

Myth #1: Aging Is Natural and So We Shouldn't Fight It

First of all, and contrary to popular belief, aging is not universal. A number of complex species, such as lobsters, rockfishes, and tortoises, do not show signs of aging. Therefore, aging is not a prerequisite to life. Aging is neither inevitable nor universal.

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Secondly, humankind is, in a sense, a struggle against nature. We have antibiotics and vaccines because we don't want to be sick, which would be the *natural* outcome in most cases. Yes, some people who drive cars, take medicines, wear glasses, receive e-mail, watch television, and don't have to kill their own dinner think life-extension is unnatural. I just think that life-extension is another adaptation of humans and one that, like many others, will make us live longer, healthier, and happier lives.

Myth #2: What's the Point of Extending Life if We Are Old?

This is a common misconception about research on the biology of aging. The ultimate goal of my work and that of many biogerontologists is to preserve and extend health, well-being, and life, not age-related debilitation. We aim not just to make elderly people live longer but—by improving their health—diminish, not extend, their suffering. What we want is to find ways to extend healthy lifespan by postponing disease and eventually eradicate all forms of age-related involution. In other words, to find a cure for aging, an intervention that permits us to avoid aging and all pathologies associated with it.