

# Remembering and Forgetting in a Society with Long-Living Individuals

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# Introduction

- Imagine the average life span increasing by a few decades
- What if longevity «happened»
  - ... in one go for all of humanity?
  - ... for a privileged few only?
- How would the advent of longevity impact societal values?
- What are the implications of longevity on remembering and forgetting?
- Longevity is a practical starting point for hypothesizing the future of remembering and forgetting because it requires conceptualizing a life, which spans (significantly) over 80 years

# Agenda

- Part 1 elaborates on longevity as individual and collective goal
- Part 2 sketches out four medical approaches contributing to longevity and discusses their potential impact on **values**
- Part 3 highlights potential conflicts between long-living individuals and society
- In part 4, I draw general conclusions, which **policy makers** could consider when (re)-evaluating policies on remembering and forgetting



# Part 1: Longevity as Individual and Collective Goal

- Humanity has always dreamt of overcoming natural limitations to the body and mind. People for example dream of flying
- Overcoming diseases is a fundamental need: imagine having to choose between ingesting a pill today and live on or die today
- As a consequence medical advances, etc., doubled the average human life span in the past two centuries
- However, society still regards ageing as an inalterable process. Dying is a self-evident matter of course
- But: Ageing leads to death; however, it is not the cause
- «Longevists» offer an alternative interpretation: ageing is a merciless endemic disease, which needs to be contained

# Jeanne Calment



# Part 2: Medical Approaches to Longevity

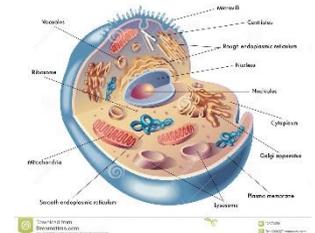
- A first approach roots in evolutionary biology (e.g., Michael Rose)



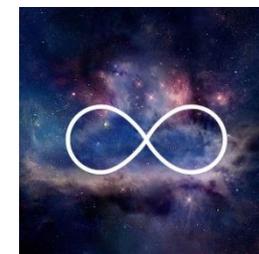
- A second approach attempts to understand ageing at a molecular level (e.g., Leonard Guarente)



- Others assume degenerative and age-related diseases to be related to cellular senescence (e.g., Judith Campisi)



- Yet others approach longevity by strategies for engineered negligible senescence (SENS) (e.g., Aubrey de Grey)



# Part 2: Longevity Scenarios

- Scenario 1 and 2: Evolutionary Longevity and Longevity «to Go»
  - Evolution: achieves longevity slowly without applying «technology»
  - To Go: Affordable longevity achieved via specific drugs for all of humanity
- Scenario 3: Privileged Longevity
  - Longevity is strictly personal, specific and mostly individual, emerges slowly innovation by innovation and creates a society split by genome and wealth
  - Medically self-aware «patients» alienate from the rest of society
  - How do «patients» not benefiting from longevity perceive the ones that do?
- Scenario 4: Cyborg Longevity
  - Merging of «regenerative» SENS approach with cybernetic organisms
  - Next to regenerative medicine application of artificial implants, extension, etc
  - Human rights→existential rights; Society to value the impaired differently
  - Alienation of society induces erosion of solidarity
  - Myriad of new treatments overstrains homologation agencies

## Part 3: «Cyborg» Neil Harbisson



# Part 3: Challenges for Remembering and Forgetting

- In general: longevity challenges «everything»; however, there is no widespread public discussion
- I want to contribute by discussing the «Cyborg Scenario»
- Starting point: For long-living individuals the recording, archiving, retrieving and interpreting of **personal memories** becomes existential
- In the «Cyborg Scenario» potential conflicts between individuals and society ignite when society
  - «remembers» memories of long-living individuals for decision making
  - «forgets» memories of long-living individuals with the intent to «forgive»
  - prevents encrustation by forcing long-living individuals to «forget»

# Part 3: Decision Making – «Remembering» Personal Memories of Long-Living Individuals

- Remembering the past influences future decision making
- In the Cyborg Scenario the recording of data is so complete that remembering it is (close to) re-experiencing a situation
- Personal memories of long-living individuals are of interest to society
- Remembering memories of long-living individuals improves decision making for society because they span a successional, coherent and long time
- Is it conceivable that personal memories represent a common good one day?

# Part 3: The Definition of Self – «Forgetting» by a Forgiving Society

- Longevity spans long enough for individuals to experience personal memories under one specific set of values and remember them under a different set
- Consider an extreme situation, e.g., a war
- Consider engineers inventing the combustion engine or assembling nuclear power plants
  
- What if you became old enough not only to experience such a situation but much more having to live with it for the rest of your (long) life?
- What if, building on the previous «remembering» personal memories of long-living individuals were common good?
- Would a new identity for the long-living inventor suffice?

# Part 3: Societal Encrustation - Eradicating an Individual's Memories

- Imagine long-living individuals staying in their jobs neglecting them to younger generations (e.g., professors, CEOs) ammassing great power
- Would it suffice to, e.g., limit terms or would be this solution to «weak» to prevent encrustation of society?
- Exiled monarchs?
- Would personal memories need to be eradicated?

# Part 4: A Guideline for Legislators on Remembering and Forgetting

- We are not in a position to predict if and when longevity occurs
- But if it does, longevity causes a transitional phase of insecurity
- Intensity of insecurity depends on how fast, who & how many become long-living
- Personal memories may become a «common good»
  
- I propose three principles underlying a design guide
  - Precautionary long-term thinking and trust in future generations
  - Good reputation and public involvement
  - Preparation / Anticipation and Improvisation

# Part 4: Precautionary Long-Term Thinking and Trust in Future Generations

- Age-related & genetic diseases become curable / onset relocatable
- Information that seems worth protecting today may be without significance tomorrow
- Vice versa, useless data today may be of importance tomorrow
- **Given the impossibility to predict what data will be relevant for future use, society should pass on data to coming generations**
- A future generation must not be «protected» by forgetting data, rather it must be trusted with it

# Part 4: Good Reputation and Public Involvement

- Transitional phase of insecurity:
  - At an individual level it could signify alienating from the rest of society
  - At a societal level, rising costs and alienation may erode solidarity
  - Discussions on the reasonableness of solidarity in society may intensify
  - In the realm of remembering and forgetting, the role of personal memories of long-living individuals for society may be discussed controversially
- From a policy maker point of view, accompanying this transitional phase of insecurity requires a good reputation
- Good reputation supports room to manoeuver & creative power
- Moreover, a few will actually design longevity, but it will concern all of humanity. All must solve what concerns all.

# Part 4: Anticipation and Improvisation (1/2)

- Why learn from the future? Anticipation to prepare policies
- Identifying changing values gives some assurance as to whether existing legislation equally accommodates tomorrow's needs
- Future outdated values may suggest engaging in a discussion and revision process, e.g.,
  - **which data to protect in the future?** (personal memories? genetic data?)
  - human rights → existential rights
- However, preparedness through anticipation may not suffice
- Policy makers should consider the possibility of the unexpected

# Part 4: Anticipation and Improvisation (2/2)

- Schumpeter's theory of economic development
  - successful innovation is as an act of creative destruction
  - entrepreneurs needs **intuition**, the **inner freedom and energy** to go to new lengths as well as the **capacity to overcome resistance** and challenges along the way
- An individual's (remembered or forgotten) information may undoubtedly be such an innovation factor
- Policy makers could therefore consider *not* to interfering with the three aforementioned cornerstones of entrepreneurship
- If innovation is desirable, then "improvisation" refers to the act of correcting legislation, which precludes Schumpeter's entrepreneur and eventually hinders progress

## Part 4: Conclusion & Discussion

In dealing with challenges stemming out of longevity, I propose a mix of anticipation and improvisation in issuing, revising and retiring policies related to remembering and forgetting.

Moreover, precautionary long term thinking along with trust in future generations may become a key point worth considering.

Finally, a good reputation of the players involved appears a reasonable assumption to make when approaching the public for a consensus on the revised legislation.