



## ПРОБА ПЕРА

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### ETHICS OF AGE: YOUTH AND PROSPECTS OF IMMORTALITY

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**Abstract.** The paper deals with increasing idealization and aesthetization of youthfulness in the 20—21 centuries. Juvenility has become one of the fundamental values of today causing the desire to stop the process of aging which leads to discrimination towards elderly people. Advancements in medicine and biological technologies urge society to believe that the project of life spans extension and immortality may be feasible in the near future. The consideration on such developments allow us to conclude that modern mankind faces a possible change of social reality through the modification of morality and the current set of values.

**Key words:** youth, ageism, gerontophobia, acme, romanticism, immortality, transhumanism

Nowadays' state-of-the-art capability has engendered a lively exchange of views between members of scientific community concerning the issue of youthfulness and life extension. Inflamed by recent scientific advances in biogerontology, the prospect of slowing down or even stopping the process of aging and thus indefinitely extending our maximum life spans has led to an increasing idealization and aesthetization of youthfulness in the modern world. It is obvious, that humanity doesn't seek to achieve the prolongation of life as such, but rather the prolongation (or restoration) of a healthy and youthful life [3. P. 319]. Juvenility has become one of the fundamental values of today causing a number of changes in the usual world order. One cannot deny that while young people's status is advancing, elderly persons' status takes its turn to the worse. The brand-new position of youth gives rise to discrimination towards old-aged people called gerontophobia (the special type of ageism which implies the fear of growing old or hatred or fear of the elderly). Given that, it was gerontophobia and youth canonization that spurred medicine to combat aging [8. P. 84].

First of all, it should be stressed, that any age within each culture has its own virtuous and aesthetic substance. Appealing to the Ancient Greece — Ancient Far East relation one can see how differently peoples and societies are able to treat age. The Greeks considered manhood and late youth to be the best time a human being can ever savour. Greek philosophy created the category “acme” (ancient Greek. Ακμή — the highest point, the vertex) — somatic, physiological, psychological and social condition of an individual, who is characterized by the successfulness of his development, the achievement of the highest rates in the activities and work of any kind. A good example of this ten-

dency is the Greek art. Hellenic artists most frequently depicted young and mature bodies in their art pieces. The cultivated image of perfect physique and beauty had not a slightest association with the physical characteristics of elderly people. Moreover, judging from the antique mythology, where gods-Olympians struggle with looming oldness by means of ambrosia (the divine nectar, which presents a drinker with eternal youth and immortality), one can say that Greek people strived for being forever young [2. P. 98].

Philosophy of ancient Japan and China works in opposite polarity. One of the most important beauty criteria in Eastern tradition is aesthetic notion “sabi”. Sabi refers to beauty or serenity that comes with age, when the life of the object and its impermanence are evidenced in its patina and wear, or in any visible repairs. Sabi also embodies natural beauty of being old and experienced. The stronger the seal of antiquity emerges, the more valuable the thing is [4. P. 53].

There is a similar state of affairs in Chinese philosophy. Veneration of ancestors and elderlies in China may be found even in the language structures. The hieroglyph “老” (lao) denotes “old” and “respected” at the same time and is usually used towards an elderly or senior person to show great homage. The shape of this hieroglyph goes back to the ancient image of an old man with long tangled hair who is working his way using a cane.

Thus, society evaluates human’s age differently in the course of any historical period. Such an axiological analysis designs the new acme of the era. Thereby, if Hellenic acme was late youth, speculators of the Far East considered oldness to be the golden age of man’s lifetime. Modern conceptions of age are fundamentally different from the previous ones. The one of the basic values of modern society is youthfulness.

Speaking of being young as an advantage, one cannot fail to refer to Romanticism. This philosophical movement mainly considered youthfulness as a spiritual category of morality, creative activity and passionate desire to change the world for the better. To be young in Romanticism is mostly to be of a good and passionate nature but not to be fresh or of a small age. The human’s body is not a youth basis to romanticists, because it is temporary and prone to withering, whereas the soul has no age as such. [7. P. 86]. So, from the physiological point of view, youth is the period between childhood and adult age associated with the qualities of vigor, freshness and immaturity while adherents of philosophy of romanticism estimate it as the domination of spirituality over materiality and enduring creativity of the individual.

Currently, the image of young people is inextricably linked to their appearance. Furthermore, sometimes the ideal “spring of life” image prevails over the spirituality. Should it happen, aging people present themselves with the new cherished goal — youth prolongation. This tendency was wittily mocked by Somerset Maugham in his novel “The Moon and Sixpence”: “Youth has turned to gods we of an earlier day knew not, and it is possible to see already the direction in which those who come after us will move. The younger generation, conscious of strength and tumultuous, have done with knocking at the door; they have burst in and seated themselves in our seats. The air is noisy with their shouts. Of their elders some, by imitating the antics of youth, strive to persuade themselves that their day is not yet over; they shout with the lustiest, but the war cry sounds hollow in their mouth; they are like poor wantons attempting with pencil, paint and powder, with shrill gaiety, to recover the illusion of their spring” [5. P. 13].

Why is youthfulness that desirable? The main benefits which are attributed to young people are social mobility in any field of activity, inexhaustible energy, open-mindedness and creativity. Young people are ambitious and have the ability to create new strategies of solving various problems quickly and easily. Potentially, youth is extremely efficient: youngsters are able to work hard and recover swiftly. Lacking experience, they substitute it for ardor and self-confidence.

On the other hand, old age is considered to be the last and saddest part of life. The process of aging is not only a biological process of fading of the body, but also a spiritual exhaustion, “fatigue” of the soul and decay of creativity. Such an image of aging sparks age discrimination towards old people (gerontophobia) and makes their life much worse [8. P. 69].

A direct consequence of this is a huge increase in demand for aesthetic plastic and cosmetic surgery. Furthermore, nowadays people are very interested in life prolongation technologies. Taking into account the ongoing evolution of modern medicine and biology, the project of radically extending our life spans and even reaching the condition of immortality for some individuals seems to be technologically feasible in the near future [1. P. 244].

The aspiration to endless life, however, cannot be considered as an idea generated by the thinkers of the last few centuries. There have been four main approaches to immortality throughout the history of thought:

- 1) semi-immortality through accomplishments;
- 2) semi-immortality through procreation;
- 3) spiritual immortality;
- 4) physical immortality through not dying.

Adherents of the first concept believe that they can achieve “immortality” through their “legacy”, through their acts and the achievements that they leave behind, whereas those of the second one consider that they leave the important part of themselves in their kids and by means of that continue their journey along the life’s continuum. Spiritual immortality, on the other hand, is a belief that is expressed in nearly every religious tradition. In both Western and Eastern religions, the spirit is energy or force that transcends the mortal shell, and returns to either the heavens or the cycle of life, directly or indirectly depending on the religious tradition. Last, but not the least, physical immortality is the prospect for extremely long or eternal life spans made possible by scientific advances in a variety of fields. One of the most prominent philosophical movements which advocates for physical immortality is Transhumanism. It aims to transform the human condition by developing and creating widely available sophisticated technologies to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities. Transhumanist thinkers study the potential benefits and dangers of emerging technologies that could overcome the fundamental human limitations such as death [6. P. 20]. The most common thesis is that humans may eventually be able to transform themselves into different beings with abilities so greatly expanded from the natural condition as to merit the label of immortal posthuman beings. It should be acknowledged, that this is not just an expression of the universal wish to live forever but, at a deeper level, arises from the impossibility

of bearing the mental pain of experiencing ordinary human vulnerability and loss — death being the ultimate expression of such vulnerability.

However, what can immortality really bring about? If one's character remains fixed throughout eternity, then one will become bored and detached from life because all of the possibilities that one person, with a particular character, can have will ultimately become fulfilled. He therefore determines that life is not infinitely pleasurable, even though pleasure does accumulate over time, because if one were to live forever, eventually all the pleasures relevant to one person's particular character would be satisfied. This boredom that an immortal life results in is not just an instance of boredom that may occur in a finite life, but it is boredom that is inescapable due to the combination of an infinite life with a finite number of possibilities. It also makes clear that the quality of life has no less importance than life's quantity. So, high quality life of smaller duration is more preferable than an infinite miserable one. Moreover, many of human relationships and activities are dependent on the finite temporal structure of life. Through the awareness of the finitude of life, there is a sense of urgency in the types of activities people pursue. Thus, many of our human values — specifically the value of life as such — are inseparable from the fact that life is finite.

Romanticists considered youth as a precious asset of soul in the first place. Today new technologies allow people to rejuvenate themselves. Because of that, humanity forgoes the core idea of romanticist and worships youth as the main feature of the body giving rise to ageism. Such a cult of being forever young and never growing old, along with the fear of death, spurs the aspiration to live forever. It is suggested that the pursuit of immortality leads to a denial of the emotional significance of passage of time. Given that, if death — the termination of life — were removed, the necessary condition that presents life as something to be valued would also be removed, along with many of the human values that are inseparable from the finite temporal structure of life such as desire for procreation, starting a family, love, self-fulfillment etc.

Assuming that the purpose of life prolongation is not the prolongation of old age, but the preservation or recovery of youth, human's efforts are less likely to be successful if youth is not merely a condition of the body, but also, and even more so, a condition of the mind. Although people may be able to arrest the aging of the body, they may not be able to arrest the aging of the mind which comes with experience.

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## ЭТИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ВОЗРАСТА: МОЛОДОСТЬ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ БЕССМЕРТИЯ

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В настоящее время в мире наблюдается тотальная идеализация и эстетизация молодости как человеческого акме XX—XXI вв. Молодость становится одной из базовых ценностей современности, что порождает культ ее сохранения, который стоит у истоков эйджизма и его ответвления — геронтофобии. Сегодня медицина стремится в своем развитии к максимально возможному продлению человеческой молодости, и, как следствие, жизни. Человек снова возвращается к идее вечной жизни как к достижимой в недолгосрочной перспективе, что влечет за собой множество этических и социальных последствий, которые в корне изменят социальную реальность современности.

**Ключевые слова:** молодость, эйджизм, геронтофобия, акме, романтизм, бессмертие, трансгуманизм

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