Curing Aging Could Transform Society
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Some people want to live forever, and they are actively working to accomplish just that. These people view aging as a curable disease, and they are supporting and conducting research to cure it I don't share this goal, but I do agree that if they succeed, society could be dramatically transformed.

The dream of immortality is not about cheating death, hanging onto some minimal shred of life for as long as possible. It's not about keeping the old alive. Instead, it's about cheating the aging process. It means not just staying alive, but staying healthy.

Imagine keeping all your youthful strength and mental clarity as long as you'd like. You could still die if you want to, but you would get to choose when. In the meantime, you could get around to all those things you've been meaning to do but haven't been able to find the time. Would you like to read the complete works of Shakespeare, or learn how to play ukelele? Would you like to perfect a magnum opus? If aging is cured, then you might just get your wish.

You would also have the opportunity to continue working for as long as you'd like. And here's where we could see major changes to society. Consider this: Current life expectancy in the United States is about 78 years. A typical retirement age is 65. A college-educated worker will enter the workforce around age 22. That means that the person is working for 43 years and is doing other things for 35 years. 55% of the person's life is spent as part of the workforce. For people who pursue graduate education, the percentage is even higher.

Now imagine that people could continue working for an extra 100 years. A college education would still take the first 22 years, and a retirement could still take the last 13. But the retirement is now at age 165, after working for 143 years. 80% of the person's life would be spent as part of the workforce. Or, put differently, about 80% of people alive at any given time would be working, instead of 55% under given current life expectancies. This means more people to pay for education, social security, and everything else our society cares for.

Of course, we wouldn't treat a 143 year career the same as we treat a 43 year career. Anyone working that long would have much more opportunity for advanced training, and for putting that training to use. With current life expectancies, decades of wisdom and experience are lost every time a talented professional retires. We should be grateful that these people have contributed as much as they do, but we should also consider how much they could contribute, if only they were with us for longer.

The virtues of age extend beyond the professional realm. If you were reading the complete works of Shakespeare, imagine the Bard himself still being around to discuss his works with you. While we probably can't bring him back from the dead, we may be able to keep today's great writers alive for future generations to enjoy. Similarly, we couldn't bring back our great-great-great-great-great grandparents to teach us about our family history, but we could keep ourselves alive to teach our history to our descendants.

Here one might wonder if curing aging would lead to overpopulation. I personally doubt it. Instead, I expect that people would simply wait longer before having children. I say this as a 31 year old surrounded by decisions about having kids. People around my age, at least in the United States, face a

delicate balance of waiting long enough to have more personal and professional security, but not waiting so long that our bodies are no longer up to the task. If our bodies could stay healthier for longer, then we could gain more security first and have children when we wanted to, instead of when we need to. That would be a great advantage.

Ultimately, however, I do not view curing aging as the most important task for society. In terms of health, I think we can get much more progress by focusing on simple adjustments like improving basic nutrition and exercise. And relative to other issues, I think we would be wise to focus on the big catastrophes that threaten everyone's health – things like climate change, nuclear warfare, and pandemics. If this means that I don't get to live to be 178, that's fine with me, as long as the next generations are there to continue humanity's great journey.