Cave, "Why you should not choose to live forever"

Notes and study questions, pp. 3 - 16

You are reading sections 1 - 3 in this chapter (and not sections 4 and 5). There are also two more chapters by Cave in the book from which this chapter is taken, and there are three chapters by John Martin Fischer. The book is *Should you choose to live forever? A debate* (2024, Routledge).

Section 1, pp. 3 - 4

In this section, Cave states his position and what he is going to argue in this chapter.

Section 2.1, pp. 4 - 7

What is *moderate life extension*?

What is *radical life extension*? In this scenario, could people still die? If so, how?

What is *contingent morality*? In this scenario, could people still die? If so, how? Cave describes one way in which contingent morality could (perhaps) be achieved. What is it?

What is *true immortality*? How is this different than radical life extension and contingent morality? How might true immortality be achieved?

Section 2.2, pp. 7 – 11

The stories about Professor Vitalonga and Guru Whitbeard illustrate that, even if their claims were legitimate, the kind of "living forever" that they are offering isn't what we would want. Cave explains why this is in the paragraph at the bottom of p. 8 and the top of p. 9 (the one that begins, "Would you accept").

The first full paragraph on p. 9 contains more ways in which "living forever" would fail to deliver what we want (regarding the sense of *living forever* discussed in this chapter).

How does Cave define the *identity criterion* in the paragraph in the middle of p. 9 (the one that begins, "When we consider")?

(*a*) You as a baby and you today are qualitatively identical or numerically identical?

(*b*) Similarly, you today and you in forty years will be _____ identical but not _____ identical.

In the paragraph on p. 9 that begins "Philosophers distinguish" and in the next paragraph (on pp. 9 – 10), Cave explains and distinguished between *qualitative identity* and *numerical identity*. These are two terms about which we want to be clear, but neither (at least on its own) is the specific notion of identity that we need as we explore living forever.

1. We do need the concept of *numerical identity*. If we are talking about you living forever, we (probably) want you to be the same individual in 1,000 years who is reading this now—although a reproduction of you produced from a perfect scan might still be you, even though it (arguably) wouldn't be numerically identical to the you who is reading this right now.

2. Numerical identity isn't all that we want though.

   If someday (no time soon hopefully) you have a massive stroke, your cortex is destroyed, and you essentially become a vegetable, then the body in the hospital bed will be numerically identical to the you who is reading this. But the body in the hospital bed will no longer be you (that is, the real you). After all, it can't speak or move, and it has none of your memories, characteristics, habits and so forth.

3. The concept of *qualitative identity* isn't, actually, too relevant to living forever.

   Assuming you didn't undergo any major life changes recently, your friends and family expect you to have all of the same qualities today that you had last week. And if you, for some reason, suddenly became a "completely different person" (even though you remained numerically identical to the you from last week), they would be worried. But nonetheless, over years and decades (and centuries and millennia if you live forever), we do change. Thus, although I am numerically identical to the Greg Johnson who went to high school in Virginia, I am not qualitatively identical to that person. So, if we are considering radical life

extension, contingent immortality, or true immortality, qualitative identity won't be an option.

4. As we explore living forever, what we want are criteria that allow us to say that this person who has lived for thousands or millions of years is still you. Changed, of course, but still the real you. It's not easy to determine what the right criteria would be for this task, but personal identity theories try to specify the correct criteria. Cave doesn't describe any of those theories, which would take him too off-track, but that okay because, as he says, we don't need the criteria, we just need this notion of the *real you surviving*.

Section 2.3, pp. 11 – 14

The topic of this section is stated in the first paragraph:

> We have discussed the various meanings of 'forever', and what it means to live on. Now we need to explore what we mean by asking whether we should choose it.

And whether we should choose it brings us to two ways of thinking about what we should do: (1) Would it be good or bad for me? and (2) Would it be morally correct (or at least morally acceptable)?

The first question, would living forever be good or bad for me, is a prudential question. And you are going to read the section (section 3) where Cave explores this prudential question. (You're not going to read section 4 where he explores the ethical question.)

What is Cave's definition of the *prudential criterion*?

Section 2.4, pp. 14 – 16

In this section, Cave introduces two terms that he also uses in section 3 (although in section 3 they have a slightly different meaning): *immortality-sceptics* and *immortality-optimists* (and sometimes he drops the "immortality" and just calls them *sceptics* and *optimists*.

In this section, the immortality-sceptics (in the very first paragraph) are those who "believe that we cannot live forever." And the immortality-optimists (just referred to as *optimists* on p. 15) "extrapolate from the trends of the past decades to argue that we can continue to live longer and longer" (p. 15, mid.).

In the next section, Cave uses *immortality-optimists* to refer to those who argue that we should want to live forever and *immortality-sceptics* to refer to those who argue that we should ***not*** want to live forever.

In section 2.4, Cave discusses three reasons why we should explore the question Should we want to live forever? He devotes multiple paragraphs to two of the reasons; so, make a note of what each one is and where he discusses it.

Section 3, intro, pp. 18 – 19

In this introduction to the section (before he starts on section 3.1), Cave asks whether we can address the question Would living forever be right for me? by collecting data. What kind of data does he consider? And what does he conclude about the value of this data? (That is, how well would it help us answer the question Would living forever be right for me?)

The last paragraph of this introductory section begins, "So we cannot rely on experience—our own or that of others. We must therefore *speculate* about whether living forever is to be wished for." (*Speculate* isn't my favorite word here since this section is not idle speculation. It's reasoning that is based on what we know about humans. But the point is that there's no data that we can collect or experiments that we can do that will help us answer the question Would living forever be right for me? Therefore, we have to do some philosophy.)

What two works of fiction does Cave say that he is going to use as case studies while investigating the question Would living forever be right for me? (More detailed descriptions of the plots are here and here—and the short story is here.)

Why are these two works of fiction relevant for Cave's investigation?

What are Cave's four "main worries regarding whether unending life would be good for any given individual"?