

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

Notes and study questions, pp. 18 - 26

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”?

Section 3.1, pp. 19 - 25

In *The Makropulos Secret*, Emilia Marty, Ellian MacGregor, Elina Makroulos, and E.M. are numerically or qualitatively identical?

What is Vitek’s attitude toward people living for 300 years? Does he seem to think that it would be a good thing or a bad thing?

How does Cave describe E.M. at the top of p. 20? Why is E.M. this way?

Cave writes that “Philosophers have interpreted the story of E.M. as an argument that living forever would inevitably be ...” what?

The 1- 5 on p. 20 is an argument. The arguments that you’ve seen so far have all had one or more premises and a single conclusion. This argument is a little bit different. 4 is a conclusion, but then once it has been “concluded,” it serves as a premise (premise 4) so that the final conclusion, 5, can be drawn.

1 and 2 are premises—and Cave discusses them on pp. 20 – 23.

It’s not exactly clear if Cave means for 3 to just be a premise or if it is, like 4, a conclusion that, once it’s established, serves as premise. It doesn’t really matter too much, though. The real question for the argument is whether 1 and 2 should be accepted or rejected. If we accept 1 and 2, then 3 isn’t controversial, and so we accept it. It, then, is needed to draw the conclusion in 4.

Cave’s investigation of this argument begins with premise 1. Right below the argument, he writes:

Premise 1 is that there is a finite number of different pleasurable activities a person can pursue. Presumably at some point E.M. loved singing—and other things too, the play suggests, such as dancing and lovemaking. But there is not an infinite variety of activities she enjoyed. (p. 20)

Cave further discusses premise 1 in the next two paragraphs. Then, in the paragraph that begins “An immortality-optimist could”, he, first, considers an objection to this premise, and then (in the last part of the paragraph and in the next one) he responds to this objection.

Next, at the very bottom of p. 21, he begins discussing premise 2. This, as he says at the top of the next page, is “probably the most disputed premise in the argument.” His discussion of this premise continues to the top of p. 23. So, that’s five paragraphs (from the bottom of p. 21 to the top of p. 23) devoted to premise 2. Note where he mentions the *immortality-sceptic* (or just the *sceptic*) and where he mentions the *immortality-optimist* (or just the *optimist*). On which side does Cave seem to be?

In the first full paragraph on p. 23 (the one that begins “What is remarkable”), Cave concludes what he has to say about living forever and boredom. What is his “preliminary conclusion”?

In the next paragraph, he says, “the seriousness of the boredom problem will vary according to the category of longer life we are considering.” How much, according to Cave, will the boredom problem affect each of the four categories of longer life?

On p. 24, Cave writes, “It is this category of living forever that is most threatened by the boredom argument.” To which category of longer life is he referring?

In the last full paragraph on p. 24, Cave describes three ways (two of which are similar) that “those religious belief systems that ascribe to true immortality attempt to deal with” the boredom problem. What are the three ways?

What problem is there (according to Cave) with the solution offered by “sophisticated theologians”? (It has to do with the identity criterion. What is the identity criterion?)

Section 3.2, pp. 25 – 26

In the beginning of section 3.2, Cave suggests that E.M. (in *The Makropulos Secret*) is not actually experiencing boredom. How is her experience different than boredom?

Cave defines *ennui* on p. 25. What is his definition?

According to Cave, is ennui better or worse than boredom?