
UNIT 1 EXTENDING PHYSICAL LIFE INDEFINITELY: SCIENTIFIC TECHNIQUES

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OBJECTIVES

- To show the possibility of extension of human life span.
- To see some of the scientific techniques useful for it.
- To see the theoretical possibility of overcoming physical death and longing for physical immortality. Please note that we speak only of the theoretical possibility. In reality, such physical immortality most probably will not take place.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

According to the creation myth of Konos tribes of Guinea, Sa or death existed before anything. Death is regarded as the primary creator in this tradition. Once, long time ago, there was only darkness and Sa lived there with his wife and daughter. Since he wanted something more durable he created a slushy kind of mud sea as a place to live. From nowhere appeared the god Alatangana and he decided to improve on the work of Sa. Alatangana made the slush solid and added animals and plants to it. Sa was pleased and they became friends. But when the god asked for Sa's daughter the friendship fell apart. However, Alatangana met the girl secretly and eloped to a distant place and they produced 14 children: four white boys, four white girls, three black boys and three black girls. The children spoke different languages and the parents could not understand them.

This made them so upset that they decided to return to Sa and ask for his advice. Sa was ready to reconcile and demanded that the black and white children do not intermarry. So the different race originated. Sa demanded further: "You have stolen my only child. Now you must give me one of yours whenever I wish it. When I wish to call one of your children I must never be denied. You will know I am called by the sound of the calabash rattle in your dream." (Lemming & Lemming 1994: 164) So it was that death for us humans is the bride-price for Alatangana's marriage with Sa's daughter. So death is intrinsically linked to human's origin.

This simple myth explains aetiologically both darkness and life, death and birth, sex and procreation and gives justification to the races. The main focus of my article is that this intimate link between death and life may be soon broken – at least in our collective consciousness. It will have shattering consequences for our human – philosophical and religious – longing and hope.

In this unit we first study the quest for human physical immortality as a religious search. We see the emerging religious and collective movements which try to overcome death. In the next section we see the scientific basis for physical immortality. Though there is no hard “scientific” evidence for physical immortality, there are so many scientific disciplines at their cutting-edge or frontier research which indicate at least the theoretical possibility for physical immortality. In the final part we see the social or religious response to such a scenario. We conclude by affirming that such a guiding of our total destiny requires a healthy dialogue between science and society.

1.2. PHYSICAL IMMORTALITY: A PRIMORDIAL HUMAN LONGING

Though the longing for an everlasting life has been a perennial quest, we are somehow used to our physical death. Since we all take our mortality for granted, the gerontologist author Herb Bowie holds that we tend to ignore the most potent anti-ageing organ in your body – the mind! If so, then the subconscious messages we are constantly sending ourselves may be sabotaging human longevity. “Can you imagine yourself living for 100 years, 120, or even longer? If not, then you may be undermining your nutritional program by feeding yourself ‘mental junk food’ -- negative programming predicting your own deterioration and demise.” (Bowie 1998)

The author exhorts that we should start feeding your mind a new food. His book, *Why Die?* speaks clearly and intelligently about the possibility of living virtually forever. By stretching the mind to accept this exciting new human possibility, we shall be conditioning ourselves to live a longer, healthier and happier life.

Most of us make the unconscious decision that we have to die. They assume that their fate is ordained by the laws of nature, or by destiny. This choice is made so early in life, and at such an unconscious level, that few people ever even challenge it. So ask the question on human immortality will shake people up. Because even to ask this question is to imply something unthinkable for many people -- that death is a choice, and not a foregone conclusion. Further, most of us feel disoriented and threatened by the consideration of physical immortality as a real possibility. It is within these chilling prospects that the author introduces the concept of physical immortality.

To understand the idea of living forever, according to Bowie, we must look at two very different aspects of physical immortality. On the one hand, it is about eternity, about surviving to some unthinkably distant point in the future. On the other hand, though, it is all about choosing how to live our lives today. It is only when we connect these two extremes, and find a way to live our lives as an unbroken continuum between these two points, that we fully achieve physical immortality. There is an element of paradox here.

This paradox is also expressed in these haunting lines from William Blake.

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour. (Capra 1977: 288)

We believe that Blake was not speaking metaphorically though. In the book the author wants to talk about transforming the quality of our lives today, by focusing our attention on our own eternity. At the same time, I will be talking about actually living for hundreds and thousands of years, by focusing our attention on the quality of our lives today. The author asserts that if such a view seems like a paradox, then this is only because we view our today's and our tomorrow's as separate and unconnected.

Physical immortality is difficult, in a way, to talk about at length because it can be approached from so many different angles. Since all of these perspectives are equally valid, it is impossible to do the subject justice by discussing it in a strictly linear fashion. We can start with forever and work backwards. We can start with today and go forwards. We can talk about the fate of humanity, or we can discuss the personal feelings of one individual. No matter how we approach the subject, though, we always seem to arrive at the same conclusion: that living forever is a practical and meaningful goal.

Reaching the same conclusion from so many different starting points is reassuring in the long run, but can be a bit disconcerting at first, as we repeatedly shift perspectives. We may feel more comfortable with some approaches than with others, and so may be tempted to skip around.

Following similar lines of thought, another scholar claims that the first immortal human beings are living among us today. (Bova 2000) It is asserted by its proponents that there are men and women alive today who may well be able to live for centuries, perhaps even extend their life-spans indefinitely. For them, death will not be inevitable. Death will have to die for them!

Such immortal humans will not age. They will not become feeble and sickly. Ageing will be stopped, even reversed. One may be young and vigorous forever. Accidents and violence will not disappear, of course. People will still be vulnerable to poor judgement, bad luck and evildoers. But death from old age, death as the inescapable end of life, will become a thing of the past, a dark memory of primitive days. As the American immunologist William R. Clark put it, "Death is not inextricably intertwined with the definition of life." Just because human beings have always died does not mean that they always will die.

This same idea is reflected in the leading article of a acclaimed German weekly. (Spiegel 2000) It asserts that immortality belongs to the originary human desire (*Ursehnsucht*). It will not just redeem humanity from death but raise it almost to the level of gods. Michael Fossel, professor of Clinical Medicine in the State University of Michigan asserts: "the most significant turn in the human history has begun. In twenty years we can stop the process of ageing and reverse biological clock." He certainly is a super-optimist. Philipp Lee Miller of the Longevity Institute in Los Gatos, prophesies: "in a few years time 80 year olds will feel like 20 year olds and will play like teens." This sentiment is accentuated by the New Yorker Professor Michio Kaku, who expects a tripling of life expectancy and a cessation of ageing process in a few years time.

The above longings and claims make it abundantly clear that immortality is slowly distilling into the collective unconsciousness of humanity. We shall study further the claims of immortality and see if there is any psychological and scientific basis for it.

1.3. PHYSICAL IMMORTALITY: A LATENT HOPE OR TALL CLAIM?

The authors who write on this subject rightly maintain that in the quest for immortality time is on our side. The medical and biological advances that will be achieved over the next ten to twenty years will undoubtedly allow us to live long past one hundred; and the longer you live, the more knowledge that biomedical scientists glean, the farther and farther our life-span will be extended. Finally it is hoped to reach the unlimited and immortal state. Of course, most of the authors admit that very few scientists accept today that immortality is within our grasp. Even those working in the fields of cellular biology, molecular genetics and life extension have not yet faced the fact that current research has already opened the path to human immortality. That is the crucial issue. The authors of human physical immortality maintain that it is an achievable aim, an approachable goal.

A poignant case in this respect is a book. (Bowie 1998) Here we give a summary of the Book *Why Die* (Bowie 1998) The book consists of 12 parts. In the first part which deals with “The Vision” Herb Bowie offers a fictional look into the next century. This narrative focuses on one couple as they experience the possibility of living forever. The story gives a good overview of what is meant by physical immortality, and introduces many ideas that will be expanded on later in the book. The second part, “Beginnings,” includes several different chapters that, in different ways, start the discussion of living forever. Our culture has produced many different images of physical immortality, so a terminological discussion on the term ‘immortality’ is called for. The origins of the idea of immortality is traced, pointing out that the idea of living forever is not really as strange as it may first seem. One may be surprised to hear what some experts in related fields have to say on the subject. Finally, the author looks at the case of someone who decided to stick with the safety of conventional beliefs, and strongly suggest that we try something different.

Part three, “The Decision to Live,” suggests that life and death are the results of decisions we make, and not things that just happen to us. A straightforward quiz that will determine your IQ (Immortality Quotient) is given. Many forms of social conditioning prepare us to pack it in after only 70 or 80 years, and these will be pointed out. Also included here will be a discussion of the benefits that a belief in our own physical immortality can have on your life today.

Further, the next part, “How To Live Forever,” reveals what the author calls the 15 minimum requirements for physical immortality. He believes that these techniques are bound to improve your life today, and offer real hope of extending our lives indefinitely. Part five, that deals with “Feelings,” talks about the importance of recognizing and nurturing our feelings of being here forever. In this part of the book Bowie talk about what it feels like to look forward to eternity.

The next part of the book looks at the possibility of human physical immortality from a scientific perspective. It is pointed out that the physical and biological sciences have found no fundamental



quest for immortality is based on scientific facts. There are many ways of approaching this subject. Many fields are involved indirectly in the quest for immortality (Strout 1998).

We believe that there may be a real possibility to extend the human lifespan, although it may not be infinitely. Scientists may develop new biotechnologies to slow down the body's aging process and vastly increase the length of the human lifespan in the future. So the research is called life-extension research. Our lifespan is maximum 100 years or so, better ways to treat and cure diseases have made it possible for people to live longer on an average. But, life-extension research aims at making it possible for people to live much longer lives than we do today, not simply by treating or curing disease, but by slowing down the actual aging process itself. Some scientists estimate that we could live up to 150 years or more by intervening in the rate that we age. Also there are many possibilities that I mention below.

a. Ageing Associated with Mitochondria

The Journal *Science* (Science 2000) reports that specific changes in the mitochondria DNA (mtDNA) are associated with ageing. There are several reasons to believe that the mitochondria may be important in ageing. The mitochondria are the generators that power our cells. In performing this function they generate free radicals. Therefore changes in the mitochondria that occur with ageing are of practical interest for those who would like to extend the human life span. (Hewitt 1996)

Mitochondria are unique components of a cell because they possess DNA of their own and replicate in a manner similar to the cells in which they are found. This DNA is a remnant of the ancient forerunner of the mitochondria which was a free-living bacterium. This study, which was conducted at the California Institute of Technology focused on mutations in the region of mtDNA that controlled the replication of the mtDNA itself. It was found that specific mutations in the control region would appear and proliferate within individuals as they age. This complements prior work that demonstrated that the amount of active mtDNA declines as an individual ages. It may be that the accumulation of the mutations such as those detected in this study are the underlying cause of this phenomenon.

This study involved meticulous and laborious bench work and data analysis. Samples from over twenty individuals were assayed for multiple mutations. In some cases two samples from the same individual at different ages were processed. Certain mutations were common (57%) in older individuals (above 65 years) but absent in samples from younger individuals. In the samples taken from the same individual at different ages (longitudinal studies) the same frequency of mutations was also observed. This data indicates that specific mutations in mtDNA become more frequent with age. However, these results do not prove that these mutations are involved in ageing. Further studies will be required to determine if these mutations are related to impaired function of the mitochondria.

One concern that emerges from these experiments is related to the fact that the region being examined is involved in mitochondrial DNA replication. This means that it is possible that mutations in this region may impair or increase the efficiency of replication of the mutated mtDNA. Therefore, it is quite possible that the mutations observed in this study give rise to

mitochondria that are more efficient at self-replication. This would explain the accumulation of mtDNA with these mutations with the passage of time (i.e. in older individuals) without any role in the phenomenon of ageing. (Hewitt 1996)

b. Cryonics

Cryonics is the low-temperature preservation of humans and animals who can no longer be sustained by contemporary medicine, with the hope that healing and resuscitation may be possible in the future. Ideally, cryonics would allow clinically dead people to be brought back in the future after cures to the patients' diseases have been discovered and aging is reversible. Modern cryonics procedures use a process called vitrification which creates a glass-like state rather than freezing as the body is brought to low temperatures. This process reduces the risk of ice crystals damaging the cell-structure, which would be especially detrimental to cell structures in the brain, as their minute adjustment evokes the individual's mind (Immortality 2011).

c. Cyborg or Cybernetic

A cyborg is the short form for a "cybernetic organism". It is a being with both biological and artificial parts. Fictional cyborgs are portrayed as a synthesis of organic and synthetic parts, and frequently pose the question of difference between human and machine as one concerned with morality, free will, and empathy. The term was coined by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in 1960 to refer to their conception of an enhanced human being who could survive even in extraterrestrial environments.

Transforming a human into a cyborg can include brain implants or extracting a human mind and placing it in a robotic life-support system. Even replacing biological organs with robotic ones could increase life span and depending on the definition, many technological upgrades to the body, like genetic modifications or the addition of nano-robots would qualify an individual as a cyborg. Such modifications would make one impervious to aging and disease and theoretically immortal unless killed or destroyed.

Their concept was the outcome of thinking about the need for an intimate relationship between humans and machines as the new frontier of space exploration was beginning to take place. Generally, the term "cyborg" is used to refer to a human with bionic, or robotic, implants. These mechanical parts enhance the body's "natural" mechanisms. Some theorists cite such modifications as contact lenses, hearing aids, or intraocular lenses as examples of fitting humans with technology to enhance their biological capabilities; however, these modifications are no more cybernetic than would be a pen or a wooden leg. Cochlear implants that combine mechanical modification with any kind of feedback response are more accurately cyborg enhancements.

d. Mind Uploading or Whole Brain Emulation

Mind uploading or whole brain emulation is the hypothetical process of scanning and mapping a biological brain in detail and copying its state into a computer system or another computational device. The computer would have to run a simulation model so faithful to the original that it would behave in essentially the same way as the original brain, or for all practical purposes, indistinguishably. The simulated mind is assumed to be part of a virtual reality simulated world, supported by a simplified body simulation model. Alternatively, the simulated mind could be assumed to reside in a computer inside a humanoid robot or a biological body, replacing its

brain. In theory, if the information and processes of the mind can be disassociated from the biological body, they are no longer tied to the individual limits and lifespan of that body. Furthermore, information within a brain could be partly or wholly copied or transferred to one or more other substrates, thereby reducing or eliminating mortality risk (Mind Uploading 2011).

One idea that has been advanced involves uploading an individual's personality and memories via direct mind-computer interface. The individual's memory may be loaded to a computer or to a newly born baby's mind. The baby will then grow with the previous person's individuality, and may not develop its own personality. This could be accomplished via advanced cybernetics, where computer hardware would initially be installed in the brain to help sort memory or accelerate thought processes. Components would be added gradually until the person's entire brain functions are handled by artificial devices, avoiding sharp transitions that would lead to issues of identity. After this point, the human body could be treated as an optional accessory and the mind could be transferred to any sufficiently powerful computer. Another possible mechanism for mind upload is to perform a detailed scan of an individual's original, organic brain and simulate the entire structure in a computer. Whatever the route to mind upload, persons in this state would then be essentially immortal, short of loss or traumatic destruction of the machines that maintained them (Immortality 2011).

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the significance of cryonics?

.....

2) What is mind uploading?

.....

e. Stem cell Research

Like the two sides of the coin, stem cells have both merits and demerits. It is always better to approach a thing in optimistic way. Likewise, I am going to deal with stem cells in more positively. Stem cells have the capacity to develop into all kinds of cells and also it can repair the damaged cells too. So it is used in medical field to cure the diseases like diabetes and heart disease. According to me stem cells are the pinnacle of achievement by modern science, because it cures very many diseases. Likewise it also cures some genetic problems too. Stem cells are divided and transformed into another cell to cure the damaged cell. It also can be used in cloning and can develop human arts in laboratory. Thus it helps humans to lead a long life. I feel that stem cells research paves way to the better living humanity for a long duration without diseases. Today, science has becoming the blessing in the life of many. My diseases no more control my life, but with the help of science I can construct my life and march towards a new horizon of hope

f. Cloning for Extending Life?

When Dolly was unveiled three years ago as the first cloned mammal it was as if the new millennium had already dawned. From the pages of pulp fiction and B movies came the clones with an all out media blitz which had pundits opining and scientists pontificating. On this occasion it seems that the media feeding frenzy was proportionate to the significance of the discovery. (Hewitt 1996)

One issue that was of particular interest was whether the age of Dolly's cells would reflect their previous incarnation or did Dolly start with a *tabula rasa* like any new-born. It was soon determined that Dolly's cells were older than sheep that had been born naturally. It had been hoped that the nuclear transfer cloning technique would be able to provide a limitless supply of cells for regeneration and repair of diseased tissues. The limited life-span of Dolly's cells were a setback for this goal.

The April 28th, 2000 issue of science features a report indicating that Dolly's premature frailty is not necessarily the rule when dealing with clones. On the contrary, it appears that clones can actually be younger than naturally born animals. The bearer of this joyous news is an aptly named young calf, Persephone.

The clones in this study were made by a technique that is somewhat distinct from how Dolly was produced. The cells that were used to generate Dolly and Persephone were halted at different stages of the cell cycle. Dolly was produced from cells that had temporarily withdrawn from the cell cycle into a stage referred to as G0 or quiescent phase. Persephone, on the other hand, was produced from a cell that had divided until it could undergo no further DNA replication and encountered a roadblock at the border of G1 and S phase. Persephone's mother cell was considered senescent. This may be the reason that Persephone is younger than she should be and Dolly is older than she should be.

The implications of the experiments with Persephone are enormous. This confirms that it is possible to produce a plenitude of cells through nuclear transfer and somatic cell cloning. These cells can be used to repair tissues that have been damaged by ageing or disease. This research has yielded a model system which enables the examination of the role that telomere length plays in ageing. It also gives rise to the more controversial possibilities of creating longer-lived human clones. Whatever future developments proceed from this discovery, it is a watershed development in ageing research and is particularly pertinent to the telomere theory of ageing.

1.5. REFLECTIONS

Right in the beginning we must assert that the search for physical immortality is still at the level of a search. Right now, we have not seen any real possibility for attaining physical immortality. At the same time, many of our technologies may be able to extend our physical life span, which is not the same as eliminating death (or physical immortality).

Such a possibility of physical immortality has deep rooted religious consequence. Religions can ignore the challenges posed by immortality only at the danger of instant self mortality. The obvious danger of such a possibility is that each one becomes so preoccupied with his own individual immortality and forgets the human community and life in general. There is a danger

that the larger issues of providing justice for the impoverished, fostering of life in general and love as the most significant human value may be forgotten.

At the same time it must be reiterated that physical immortality does not render God superfluous, religion redundant and human longing unnecessary. Even in the situation of immortal humans there is scope for meaningful hope, for relevant religion and for a liberating God. At the same time Immortality necessitates a human hope that may be detached from physical death. In our ordinary understanding of human longing, death is seen as the starting point of eschatology or human hope. That view has to be given up and we need to delve deep into the “inaugurated eschatology” which theologians have taken seriously since few decades.

We still need to take death seriously. But death may not be given the supreme importance and inevitability that was it due once. So the human hope and fulfilment has to begin with this present world, with the here and now. There are of course social and existential problems like poverty and injustice which are to be tackled seriously.

It must be noted that overcoming physical death and attaining physical immortality does not solve the problem of human contingency. The issue of human finitude has to be addressed in a much wider sense. The tendency of those seeking physical immortality is to reduce human life to a physicalistic or mechanistic view point. They would stress that attainment of physical immortality – temporal unlimitedness – necessarily leads to human fulfillment. We need to focus also on the existential and ontological contingency of human condition, not merely that of the temporal conditioning.

So even in a world of immortal human beings, human longing and hope is imperative. Hope still remains intrinsic to humans. But it is a hope based on the day-to-day experience of humans and rooted in the present day, not one aimed primarily at a later world “a pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die” type. So life, today’s precious, fragile life, has to be taken seriously. It has to be affirmed, respected and fostered in its entirety. We can hope to pay back the bride-price for Alatangana’s marriage with Sa’s daughter and life lives “full and abundant” and not necessarily temporally limited.

1.6. SOME QUOTES

“The ancient seers were not egoistic. They called the whole humanity – past, present future – *Amrutya putra*. You are all sons of immortality. Equal and eternal.” Bhagawan Rajneesh (Osho 1998: ch3).

“Mankind will postpone human ageing substantially in the future, doubling the human lifespan at least, when we have accomplished this we will be ashamed that we did not work on it much sooner.” Michael Rose, Evolutionary Biogerontologist

"The philosophy of immortality believed will produce death. That is, believed rather than practiced. Belief is past; everlasting life is an eternal daily consciousness. It is not something you did, but something you do." Leonard Orr (Author of *The Science of Everlasting Life*).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does cloning extend human lifespan?

.....

2) What are some of the religious implications of physical immortality?

.....

1.7. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have dealt with the theoretical possibility of physical immortality and other technological ways of extending human life. We also saw some of its philosophical implications.

1.8. KEY WORDS

Cryonics: The practice or technique of deep-freezing the bodies of those who have died of an incurable disease, in the hope of a future cure

Cyborg: a person whose physiological functioning is aided by or dependent upon a mechanical or electronic device. Combination of Cybernetics and Organism.

Gerontology: The scientific study of old age, the process of aging, and the particular problems of old people

Mitochondria: An organelle found in large numbers in most cells, in which the biochemical processes of respiration and energy production occur.

Ursehrsucht: *Sehnsucht* (German) is human longing. *Ursehrsucht* is the deepest or primordial human longing.

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UNIT 2 OVERCOMING DEATH: PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To see some of the dangers of trying to eliminate death.
- To trace the origin of evil that is born out of the very desire to over evil (including death).
- To see that mortality is essentially part of human existence today.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Without attempting to give a philosophical analysis of the origin of evil, the we present some of the dynamics at work in the emergence of evil, based mostly on Paul Ricoeur and Ernest Becker. Ricoeur points out that the disproportion that characterizes human beings makes evil possible, though not necessary. The progress from *bios* to *logos* has enabled us greatly and also made evil possible. As a continuation of the philosophical analysis, Becker showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt at eliminating it. Both the thinkers trace the existence of evil (and also goodness and freedom) to the disproportion or in-betweenness in the human condition. So this article is a phenomenological description of the emergence and progress of moral evil in individual human beings and human society.

Here our warning is that those who seek to eliminate death and search for physical immortality may be adding to the evil in the world, without wanting it. Evil, according to Becker, is taking part in the immortality project.

2.2. OUR PROCEDURE

“The essence of man is discontent divine discontent; a sort of love without a beloved, the ache we feel in a member we no longer have” (Ortega y Gasset 1940) “Divine discontent” and “denial of death” are characteristics of contemporary humans. And they are also intimately connected to the emergence and existence of evil. In this essay an attempt is first made to relate evil, at least moral evil, to the basic human condition of disproportionality. For this we draw insights from two prominent thinkers of the last century: philosopher Paul Ricoeur and psychologist Ernest Becker.

Our aim in this unit is not to give any philosophical basis for evil, but to understand phenomenologically, some dynamics underlying the prevalence and progress of evil in our midst. We shall see that evil perpetuates itself in the very process of fighting it. It could be that denying and fighting death is part of such a process. After first analysing the fallibility in human nature, we try to explore the symbolism of evil, and then in the final section, see the dynamics of evil perpetuating itself in the very struggle against death, and consequently evil itself.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is disproportion of in-betweenness and how is it part of being human?

.....

.....

.....

2) “Denial of death itself is a way of fostering evil.” Comment.

.....

.....

.....

2.3. THE SYMBOLISM OF EVIL

a. The Symbol as the Starting Point for Thinking

We all can make mistakes and commit evil. Fallibility is our human inclination to make mistakes. The examination of human fallibility can show, where and how the evil in man can originate. The transition from innocence to guilt is not to be understood otherwise than as an execution of the confession by which man accepts his responsibility for his actions in symbolic language. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricœur is engaged with the concrete expressions of the human experience of evil in symbols (which we also meet in myths and in primary confessions).

Before he actually proceeds with his task of studying the symbolism of evil through its concrete expressions, Ricœur gives an account of his procedure. “How do we move from the possibility of human evil to its actuality, from fallibility to its act?” (Thorer 1984). This is the initial question for him. He wants to capture the transition from fallibility to its actualization by concentrating on the symbolism of evil from concrete human experiences. What he intends to do is a phenomenology of guilt, which repeats itself on its way to the imagination and to the projection of the confession of guilt. The phenomenology screens and orders the materials which would be the object of human thought. Thus there is an intimate connection between philosophical speculation and the pre-reflective expression (of guilt for example) in symbols. When one reflects on the philosophical expressions of evil, one is led back to the original expressions of it in the myths. Then there is the move from the myths to its building blocks – the symbols. The symbols characterise evil as blindness, as ambiguity, as anger. They refer to an oppressive experience and man in turn tries to

grasp this experience with the help of language. The experience of evil forces itself to be expressed, so that all the speaking - including the philosophical reflection - about it refers back to its original experience.

The area of investigation in *The Symbolism of Evil* is limited, as Ricœur points out. It refers to a particularly important area: how evil touches on a central and crucial relationship between man and the sacred. So it is to be expected that an examination in this area will give us a deeper understanding of the myths and symbols. In this crisis, the whole vulnerability of reality is evident: "Because evil is in a special way the critical experience of the sacred, the threatening rupture of this relationship of man with the sacred may be urgently felt, and [also] how man is dependent on the power of this sacred" (Thorer 1984: 39).

b. The Symbols of Evil: Stain, Sin, Guilt

Ricœur elaborates his understanding of evil in terms of the primary symbols of stain, sin and guilt. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, the imagination goes back to the farthest region where crime and misfortune are not to be differentiated. The Stain, which is associated with definite actions, is something analogous to a material thing. Evil action brings with it punishment. Evil action effects suffering. So the symbolism of *Stain* is the first explanation and rationalisation of suffering. The imagination of a stain points to a judging and avenging instance, which though remaining anonymous, concretises itself in the laws and rules of society. When the guilty is accused of a crime, there is also a simultaneous expectation of responsibility, of proper punishment and with it a hope that the fear and consequences of this crime would thus disappear (Bradley 2005: 444f).

A new step in the development of evil is the building up of *sin consciousness*. This consciousness presupposes a personal relationship to the God who invites us. Sin shows that aspect of guilt felt in the presence of God. Biblically speaking, sin is the breaking of the covenant. The next stage of internalisation is reached with the formation of *guilt consciousness*. Guilt shows the subjective moment of the crime (to be differentiated from sin, the objective, ontological moment). Guilt consciousness consists of the fact that one is intensively aware of one's responsibility and of his ownership. In this sense, it is anticipated and internalised, leading to pricks of conscience.

The *imagination* of evil develops from a material understanding (Stain) of evil to a deeper internalisation (Guilt). In this process the symbols of the earlier stages of development are not just denied or negated, but are carried over to the later stages of development. Thus there exists a connection between all these symbols. "So there is a circular movement taking place between all the symbols: the last symbol relives the sense of the preceding symbol, but the first gives the last the full symbolic power". If one wants to name the concept towards which the development of the original symbols of evil leads, then one is confronted here with the paradox of the "Non-free Will". This concept – which is not identical with that of fallibility, but which is to be understood only in connection with the symbolism of evil, and which in turn gives it its significance – is characterised by Ricœur as having three moments (Thorer 1984: 42):

- a. *Positivity*: Evil is a power
- b. *Expressivity*: Evil presupposes the free decision of man and comes as a temptation
- c. *Infection*: If humans give in to evil, first it is an outward act and then it spreads. It becomes contagious. At the same time, turning itself over, it tends to make the agent of the action to be innerly a slave.

So far we have analysed the philosophical contribution of Paul Ricoeur on evil, which could be enhanced by the insights of social psychologist Ernest Becker, as we proceed to the next section.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Briefly explain the three symbols of evil?

.....

.....

.....

2) Which are the three moments of evil, according to Ricoeur?

.....

.....

.....

2.4. EVIL AS DENIAL OF MORTALITY

Another prominent and insightful thinker of the last century who dwelt elaborately on evil is Ernest Becker in his two classics (Becker 1973 & 75). Like Ricoeur, he too felt that evil finds its driving force in the human's paradoxical nature: "in the flesh and doomed with it, out of the flesh and in the world of symbols and trying to continue on heavenly flight" (Becker 96). Becker humbly reminds humanity that we are still animals, with all of the instincts and seemingly irrational chaotic impulses befitting all animals. Yet, paradoxically, humanity is fitted with a sense of reason that wishes to attain a "destiny impossible for an animal" (Becker 1975: 96). What we perceive as evil, in every form, is essential to any temporal creature. It is a part of the very properties of humanity that we exhibit qualities of moral evil, according to Becker.

Ernest Becker provides part of the answer to the problem of evil; that is, the paradoxical nature of the human, just as Ricoeur does. Humanity is both animal and rational, and there lies the source of evil. A human being is a finite, limited and fallible being that is controlled mostly by animal urges based mostly around survival, while at the same time possessing a reasonable mind capable of transcending these things and reaching out to the Divine. Humans are capable of creating evil as part of their nature, choosing evil in the very search for the good. Our desire to eliminate evil may itself be our undoing (Hoffman 2002).

a. Participating in the Immortality Project

Why is it that of all the creatures on the earth human beings are the only ones to wage war, commit genocide, and build weapons of mass destruction? Social psychologist Ernest Becker raised this question and then proposed an insightful answer in his book, *Escape from Evil* (Becker 1975), going one step further than Ricoeur.

Becker's answer begins by recognizing that of all creatures, human beings alone seem to be the ones who are conscious of their own mortality. This awareness gives rise to an anxiety that most

people would rather not feel. So people cope with this situation by essentially choosing sides. They choose to align themselves with the side of life rather than of death, or identifying themselves with “immortality projects” (Hoffman 2002). People align themselves with the side of life by seeking anything that promises to sustain and promote their own lives, such as power or money. Alignment with power can have two faces: malignant power over others, as the power created by autocrats, or benevolent power, as in the power vested in the skills of a physician. Likewise, alignment with money can result in exploitation or philanthropy.

It may be noted that people also seek to align themselves with the side of life by seeking alignment with things that endure beyond a single individual’s lifetime. These can include making a “lasting” contribution to a field of art, literature, scientific inventions or knowledge. These can also include involvement with religious movements or specific cultures. These larger than life phenomena in some way assure the perpetuation of the significance of the people associated with them, a kind of immortality (Hoffman 2002).

From this point of view, a threat to a person’s culture, religion, or “lasting contributions” is viewed as a threat to that person’s *own* immortality project. The immortality project must be defended at all costs. This is the reason why some conflicts in the world can become so intractable. It’s not just my country or tribe that is being threatened, but the very significance of my own life. Becker says, “This is what makes war irrational: each person has the same hidden problem, and as antagonists obsessively work their cross purposes, the result is truly demonic” (Becker 1975: 109).

People also try to align themselves with the side of life by aligning themselves with what is “good.” This is because life is associated with “good” as opposed to death, which is “bad.” Becker argues that this alignment with good may also be a major cause of evil. To follow his reasoning it is necessary to make a little digression to understand the psychological concepts of shadow and projection (Becker 1973).

b. Projecting the Shadow of the Shadow

The psychological shadow is the dark complement of the consciously expressed personality. It represents those personal qualities and characteristics that are unacceptable to the conscious ego. To borrow a fitting image from the poet Robert Bly, the shadow is like a sack that you drag behind you everywhere you go and into which you toss all the aspects of yourself that you are ashamed of and don’t want to look at (Bly 1998). The psychological shadow is much like the normal human shadow: everybody has one; when you face toward the light you can’t see your own shadow; and sometimes everybody else but you can see it.

Oftentimes these disowned contents of the psychological shadow are “projected” onto someone else. Then we see “out there” what is really “in here”. Typically the person we choose to project onto is not entirely innocent. He or she has some “hooks” on which we can hang our projections. If we’re ashamed of our own anger, we find a slightly irritated person and view her as totally enraged. That’s how projection of the shadow works.

People with inflated self esteem find it easy to see themselves as being almost always on the side of the “good.” Becker’s argument is that in the process of taking the side of life and of the good, we project our shadow onto an enemy. Then we try to kill it, and in this process perpetrate evil, without our willing it. Psychologist Roy F Baumeister also reaches a similar conclusion. He holds that a major cause of evil in the world is the idealistic attempt to do good. Some examples include the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Thirty Years’ War in Europe, in which Catholic and Protestant troops devastated much of Germany in attempting to wipe out the “evil” version of the Christian faith represented by the other side, murders committed to prevent the “evil” of abortion, and the Stalinist and Maoist purges in Russia and China. He points out that “studies of repressive governments repeatedly find that they perceive themselves as virtuous, idealistic, well-meaning groups who are driven to desperately violent measures to defend themselves against the overwhelmingly dangerous forces of evil” (Baumeister 1997).

For instance, in many ways the Nazis were idealists. The Nazi SS was composed of the elite, the noblest of the population; yet they willingly committed the most horrible deeds. The Nazis wanted to transform their society into a perfect one. They wanted to root out the elements that they considered “evil”. Yet they almost never considered their own actions as evil, but perhaps at worst an unfortunate necessity in carrying out a noble enterprise (Baumeister 1997: 34, 38). The Nazis projected filth and evil on to the Jewish people and then tried to establish a “pure” state by eliminating the Jews. One of the professed motivations of racist lynchings in Western society was to maintain the “purity” of the white race. Many animal species, including coyotes, wolves, and prairie dogs have been irrationally persecuted by humans in the name of eliminating “varmints” and “filth” and “disease-carriers.” Enemies are “dirty.”

Historically, nations have been aroused to war by the depiction of the enemy as pure evil. In cases of reciprocal violence, such as war, each side tends to see itself as the innocent victim and the other as the evil attacker. If we, as a nation, do not do our own “shadow” work, we will simply respond to violence with more of the same and in this process we ourselves will perpetuate evil. Once a person has decided that some other is evil (or devil), the decision helps justify behaviours that tend to belittle or punish the other. Such behaviours are precisely the behaviours that justify the other person in seeing the first person as evil. This reciprocal projection and dehumanization usually leads to a downward spiral. Patterns of violence often grow worse over time. The typical pattern for marital violence and violence among strangers is for minor insults and slights to escalate more or less slowly to physical attacks and violent aggression (Baumeister 1997: 283).

As Baumeister points out, one of the reasons why violence tends to spiral downward is that there is typically a huge discrepancy between the importance of the act to the perpetrator and to the victim. Baumeister calls this the magnitude gap (1997: 18). For example, rape is a life-changing event for a woman, while it may be only a few moments of excitement and limited satisfaction to the rapist. Whether an SS officer murdered 25 or 30 Jews in a given day was a matter of additional work for the SS officer, but a matter of life and death for the 5 additional Jews. Hoffman notes that the magnitude gap functions in a way that makes evil worsen over time. In a pattern of revenge, as occurs in terrorism and occupation, the roles of victim and perpetrator are constantly being reversed. The perpetrator (A) may think he has harmed the victim (B) only at a level of, say, one damage point. The victim (B) however feels harmed at a

level of ten points. To exact tit-for-tat revenge, B perpetrates harm on A at a level of ten, which from B's point of view may seem only fair, but from A's point of view may feel like harm at a level of 100. This of course seems totally out of proportion and requires further revenge as A and B switch roles again (Hoffman 2002).

Becker's analysis offers a way understanding the instances of genocide and mass murder in human history. He suggests, chillingly, that one way to gain the illusion of psychological power over death is to exert physical control over life and death. He points out that the killings in the Nazi concentration camps increased dramatically toward the end of the war, when the Nazis began to have a sense that they might actually lose. Mass slaughter gave the illusion of heroic triumph over death/evil.

In Becker's terms, people who maximize their own take are maximizing the "side of life" narrowly understood as their own welfare. They act to eliminate the "evil" of their own impoverishment. They ignore the fundamental fact of our human interrelatedness, a fact attested to by spiritual traditions throughout history (Hoffman 2002) and in this process aggravate the evil they wish to alleviate.

2.5. FINAL REFLECTIONS

In this unit we had the modest aim of indicating some of the dynamics in the working out of evil. Ricoeur's understanding of the disproportion that characterizes human beings was, he came to conclude, insufficient to account for occurrences of actual will. No direct, unmediated inspection of the cogito, as Descartes and Husserl had proposed, could show why these evils, contingent as each of them is, in fact came to be. Recognizing the opacity of the cogito in this respect confirmed his suspicion that all self-understanding comes about only through "signs deposited in memory and imagination by the great literary traditions." The progress from *bios* to *logos* has enabled us greatly and also made evil possible. Thus we have arrived at an antinomy and this is where philosophy has to stop.

By refusing to accept mortality as part of their very nature, humans deny their animality and attempt to be divine. In this very process of denial of death and anxiety, the humans join the "immortality projects" and disrespects the disproportion that is intrinsic to the human condition, enabling evil to emerge. As a continuation of the philosophical analysis, Becker showed the psychological dynamics at work, whereby evil multiplies itself in the very attempt at eliminating it. Though both the thinkers trace the existence of evil to the disproportion or in-betweenness in the human condition, it has not been our aim to give any account of the origin of evil.

So Tao Te Ching's insight, formulated 2500 years ago, is valid even today.

There is no greater misfortune
than to underestimate your enemy.
Underestimating your enemy
means thinking that he is evil.
Thus you destroy your three treasures
and become an enemy yourself (Lao-Tzu 1995).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How is participating in the immortality project something wrong?

.....

2) How and why do we project our own shadow unto ourselves?

.....

2.6. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have analysed our existential condition. In our very quest to eliminate evil, we add to it. This warning must be taken seriously even in our quest to eliminate physical death.

2.7. KEY WORDS

Fallibility: Tendency inclination to be erroneous or to make mistakes

Immortality project: The human project to overcome physical death and become immortal through different means.

Shadow: In Jungian *psychology*, the *shadow* or "*shadow aspect*" is a part of the unconscious mind consisting of repressed weaknesses, shortcomings, and instincts. The *shadow* refers to the personality traits and tendencies that one has rejected in

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UNIT 3 DEPTH OF DEATH: A PHILOSOPHICAL OVER VIEW

Contents

- 3.0. Objectives
- 3.1. Introduction
- 3.2. Understanding Of Death In General
- 3.3. Death in Martin Heidegger's Thought
- 3.4. Thomas Nagel's Viewpoint of Death
- 3.5. Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5. Key Words
- 3.6. Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To initiate the students to reflect on death and see it as part of life.
- To have a general understanding of human death.
- To understand the different views of Heidegger and Nagel on death.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Death is the cessation of the connection between our mind and body. Intellectually, everyone knows that one day all will die. We are usually so reluctant to think of our death because this knowledge does not touch our hearts, and it is inauspicious even to talk about death. Death spares no one. We can affirm with certainty that we all fall prey to death sooner or later. It is inevitable and pervades everything. Everyone should face death. Truly the word *death* is frightening for many. People like to live happily and not to suffer or get pain in the universe.

The moment we are born it is sure we will die one day. In the course of our life on earth, death plays a significant role in shaping our personality. Our time on earth or our longevity in this world is very limited; we may live at the most a hundred years. According to me death should not be threatening or fearsome to us, because it is completely natural. We need not be indifferent to death; instead we need to face death with courage, because being indifferent to something is not a solution to that problem or difficulty. The way we live decides, the way we die. Similarly the way we die announces boldly and clearly the way we lived. Instead of worrying about death that will happen in the future, living happily and facing death authentically could shape our lives meaningfully. Many people's fear of death is tied into their religious beliefs. Particularly they think about what will happen after death, but worrying about death is futile.

Philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) states that as soon as I am born, I enter into the flow of time spanning from birth to death. Death is the final condition, the end of my being-thrown. Death is my way of being-in-the-world. Also death is unique and singular to everyone. Death is a part of my life. Death is what is the most authentic in my life. So whether we like it or not we know that we are headed toward death. He clearly advises us that against a fear of death because it is a future event, and in the attempt to escape this fear is a cowardly action. So the authentic

attitude to death involves accepting it as a present possibility, awaiting it as something certain possible at any moment. Authentic human living implies facing up to the reality of what death means in our lives. It means accepting the possibility of coming to the end of life at any instant as Heidegger suggests. We must face the fact of death, as Heidegger offers us several positive potentialities.

One of the famous living American philosophers Thomas Nagel's notions of death is not easily acceptable for Christians. For Nagel, death is bad for us. In one sense this may be true, because it deprives us of an extended life. Most people are of the view that life is good even though they experience pain and suffering in their lives. Sometimes tragedy can also be a very positive state. Nagel goes further to point out some important observations about the value of life. A person may wish to do or fulfil his/her desires. But unfortunately he/she may face death at the age of twenty five or thirty. As a result death negates all our desires and wishes. Death controls our freedom by removing our longings. Looking now at what is bad about death instead of what is good about life, Nagel presents some thought-provoking insights regarding this point. Life is good because we have the conscious ability to experience and appreciate all that life has to offer. So death could be called bad because it deprives us of these experiences, and not because the actual state of death is bad for us.

3.2. UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH IN GENERAL

Here we shall see some general view and impression of death by different philosophers.

a. The Epicureans

Death is nothing to Epicureans. According to them, we fear death because of the belief that death is painful and that the soul may have to suffer in an afterlife. But both of these beliefs are not true. Death is not painful. It is a painless loss of consciousness. It is just like falling asleep and therefore nothing to be feared. "Death is nothing to us... It does not concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not and the latter are no more"- Epicurus (*in Letter to Menoeceus*). The principal criticism against this view is that the Epicureans have falsely diagnosed the cause of humankind's fear of death. Death terrorizes us, not because we fear it as painful, but because we are unwilling to lose consciousness permanently. For some anti-Epicureans, death is bad for a person, primarily because it deprives him/her of certain goods. Life would be unbearable, death is taken to be a misfortune for the one who dies, and we feel that he/she has suffered a great misfortune.

b. The Stoics

The stoics, especially Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius offered a more complicated and elusive view of death. Seneca (4BCE-65CE), a Roman adherent of Stoicism with a particular interest in ethics said that to overcome the fear of death, we must think of it constantly. They felt that there is no need to fear death. In order to overcome this fear, we should think of it in the proper manner. It reminds ourselves that we are part of nature and we must accept this truth.

c. Spinoza (1632-1677)

The Dutch Jewish philosopher Benedict de Spinoza wrote “A fearful man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is not a meditation upon death but upon life (Ethics, Prop. LXVII)”. It is interpreted to mean that man can and should allay the fear of death, simply by diverting his attention from it, and some persons have argued that by his/her nature he/she tends to follow this advice. The criticism consists in pointing out that the fear of death is frequently an involuntary sentiment that cannot be conquered by a merely conscious decision or a bare act of will. It is not enough to tell people not to think of death, one must explain how they can avoid thinking of it.

d. Leonardo de Vinci (1452-1519)

He observes that when a day is spent well one can fall asleep happily. Similarly if one can spend one's life well, one will have a happy death. A happy person would not be seriously worried about death. But the question is: can one attain full happiness on Earth? Moreover if one wants to achieve happiness in life, one must conquer the fear of death.

e. Schopenhauer and other Existentialists

Full happiness is not possible. Therefore embrace the tragedy of the human condition with a complete awareness of all evils, including death. According to Schopenhauer there is no life after death and death is totally meaningless and it is absurd. We are destined to live a life in suffering and pain. For Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) the ‘super man’ will not permit death to seek him out in ambush to strike him down unawares. The superior man will live constantly in the awareness of death joyfully and proudly assuming death as the natural and proper terminus of life (Seelan 2010).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is Spinoza's attitude to death?

.....

2) “Death is part of life.” Comment.

.....

3.3. DEATH IN MARTIN HEIDEGGER'S THOUGHT

So far, we have just introduced the general understanding of death in the above section. Here we want to go little deeper to discuss my subject based on two prominent contemporary philosophers: Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Thomas Nagel (1937).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

The most representative figure of existentialism in Germany is Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). He has also the widest influence of any of the existentialists. Heidegger brings to his personal reflection a solid erudition in the whole range of the history of the philosophy. His most famous work is *Sein Und Zeit* (Being and Time) published in 1927. He urges us to cultivate the awareness of death chiefly to our sense of life. He makes the additional claim that the awareness of death confers upon humans a sense of his/her own individuality. Dying he says is one thing no one can do for you; each of us must die alone. To shut out the consciousness of death is therefore to refuse one's individuality, and to live inauthentically. Heidegger often makes his case in dramatic language that is difficult to convey in summary form. He argues that mortality is our defining moment that we are thrown into the limited world of sense shaped by our being-toward-death. In this part, I would enumerate about death in the light of Heidegger in a detailed manner.

a. The meaning of the word 'Dasein'

The word Dasein has been used by several philosophers before Heidegger, most notably Ludwig Feuerbach, with the meaning of human "existence" or "presence". It is derived from da-sein, which literally means being-there/there-being, though Heidegger was adamant that this was an inappropriate translation of Dasein. In German, Dasein is the German vernacular term for existence, as in I am pleased with my existence (ich bin mit meinem Dasein zufrieden). According to Heidegger, however, it must not be mistaken for a subject that is something definable in terms of consciousness or a self. Heidegger was adamant about this distinction, which carried on Nietzsche's critique of the subject. Dasein, as a human being that is constituted by its temporality, illuminates and interprets the meaning of Being in Time. Heidegger chose this term as a synonym for "human entity" in order to emphasize the critical importance "being" has for our understanding and interpretation of the world. Some scholars have been confused on this issue, arguing that for Heidegger "Dasein" denoted some sort of structured awareness or an institutional way of life but the textual evidence for this claim is not strong.

Heidegger used the concept of Dasein to uncover the primal nature of "Being" (Sein) which Descartes and Kant left unexplored. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger criticized the notion of substance, arguing that Dasein is always a being engaged in the world. The fundamental mode of Being is not that of a subject or of the objective but of the coherence of Being-in-the-world. This is the ontological basis of Heidegger's work.

Heidegger attempted to maintain the definition of Dasein as we all are in our average everydayness. Dasein does not spring into existence upon philosophical exploration of itself. Heidegger intended Dasein as a concept, in order to provide a stepping stone in the questioning of what it means to be. When Dasein contemplates this, what seems circular in ontic terms, is recursive in an ontological sense, because it brings the necessary appearance of time to the center of attention (Dasein 2010).

The word is *da* has many meanings.. It means 'there' (there they go) and 'here' (here they come) as well as 'then', 'since'. Prefixed to *sein*, 'to be' it forms *Dasein*, 'to be there' 'present' 'available', 'to exist'. In the seventeenth century the infinitive was nominalised as (*das*) *Dasein* originally in the sense of 'presence'. In the eighteenth century *Dasein* came to be used by philosophers as an alternative to the Latinate *Existenz* ('the existence of God') and poets used it in the sense of 'life'. In the Being and Time, Heidegger uses *Dasein* for, 1). the being of human,

and 2). the entity or person who has this being. In lectures he often speaks of *das menschliche Dasein* 'human *Dasein*', and this too can mean either the being of human or the human being (Inwood 1999).

b. Death in Heidegger

For Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who revives the Pre-Socratic tradition, the human person is "being-towards-death." Death does not lie at the end of life; it pervades the entire life. As soon as I am born, I enter into the flow of time spanning from birth to death. Death is the final condition, the end of my being-thrown. Death is my way of being-in-the-world. This is the finitude that characterizes all human experience. However, death is unique and singular to everyone. If there is something that is not shared, it is my death; it is my own, but it remains non-representable. It always escapes me even when I will be dead, I do not possess it. Death is a part of my everything, which escapes me.

But in reality, we do not think of death; we just shy away from it as if it happens only to others. We take refuge in our everydayness that brushes aside or even buries the thought of death. Yet death is at the very heart of my being-in-the-world. So for Heidegger death is to be thought of in order to bring out my being-towards-death. This is the very condition of my freedom as well, for by evading the thought of death, I escape from the authentic "my-self" to hide in the inauthentic "they-self." By my being-thrown into the world, I am originally thrown into the "they-self," which makes me evade the question of death and of nothingness thus distracting and alienating me from "my-self." Death is what is the most authentic in my life. However *Dasein* wants to flee from death because of its anxiety before nothingness. This nothingness has its origin in the being-towards-death. This nothingness is the ontological origin even of the dialectical negation. Care is the way out of anxiety and consciousness is an appeal for care, which allows *Dasein* to get out of the anxiety of its originary being-towards-death.

Also Being-there (*Dasein*) is Heidegger's term for human existence, as opposed to that of things and animals. It is Heidegger who says, that I shall die. It is uncertain when I shall die. I may die at any moment. I cannot do anything after my death. No one can die for me. I shall die alone. This is not to deny the soldierly comradeship induced by imminent death. Every individual human must die for him/herself which reduces each individual to his/her own uttermost individuality (Inwood 1999).

c. Being-toward-death in Heidegger

Heidegger describes the human person as a "Being-toward-death in Heidegger" (Heidegger 1962). It is simply not possible for humans to live only for the moment as animals do. Whether we like it or not we know that we are headed toward death. Heidegger describes two possible attitudes that we can adopt. On the one hand we can refuse to face the full implications of the human condition by objectifying death as something that 'happens' to others and will 'happen' to each of us at some future date, but not something that affects us now in our living. This is an 'inauthentic' attitude. So, one is not able to escape the reality of death. It results in fear of death as a future event, and in the attempt to escape this fear as 'something cowardly'. On the other hand the authentic attitude to death involves accepting it as a present possibility, awaiting it as something certain possible at any moment and at the same time indefinite and accepting the anguish or anxiety of the possibility of death. This authentic attitude sets one free to choose

among the various possibilities that may be realized before the ultimate possibility of death is fulfilled. Choices will be made in the face of the fact that life may come to an end at any instant. Authentic human living implies facing up to the reality of what death means in our lives. It means accepting the possibility of coming to the end of life at any instant as Heidegger suggests. We must face the fact of death, as Heidegger gives positive potentialities.

d. Heidegger's Death: The Mortals and the Immortals

The conception of death as an existential appears in the designation of human as "the mortal"; Heidegger's favourite expression for mankind is "The Mortals" (Demske 1970). Nobody can take one's death away from one, or die in one's place. So as soon as one comes to life, he/she is at once old enough to die. Death is inevitable. All humans are mortal. Heidegger understands it as a statement about the self-revelation of being. The character of death as an existential is confirmed, in the term "the mortals". It signifies mortality as the proper and essential mode of human being. Here, what may be called being-mortal is the same existential determination which was encountered as being unto death. The immortals and mortals belong equally to the holy. Neither the one nor the other can relate directly to the holy. Humans require the gods and the heavenly one require the mortals in order to accomplish this. In this reciprocal relation, the heavenly ones mediate between the holy and the mortals. They convey the greeting of the holy to human. So "it is the death that touches the mortals in their essence and so sets them on the way to the other side of life and thus the whole of the pure net work (of being)" (Demske 1970).

Heidegger's notion of immortality springs from his notion of the *Dasein*. In Heidegger, the *Dasein* is being-unto death. For Heidegger, Death does not happen after life but happens already while living, in the experience of sickness and aging. Heidegger denies that death is external to life or another event after life. It makes the very experience of living a dying. Heidegger does this because his mode of philosophizing is contemplation of Being. There is nothing to know after death since we go back to nothingness so he has no choice but to interpret death in terms of existence, while still living. *Dasein* (there being) is Heidegger's notion of the universal human person in every individual person that has openness to Being or truth. The human being is the venue where truth appears. The positive aspects of being-unto-death are that the person already anticipates the idea of death while living and comes to reflect on the origin of things which is Being (truth). The individual person dies but the *Dasein* does not die. The individual is tasked to deliver truth to his/her fullest capacity because this affects the *Dasein*. This is the form of immortality. For Heidegger, this is not in the event of death after life, but within life. Heidegger's *Dasein* sponsors an obsession of humans to live forever. Heidegger is not interested in the discussion of God but his concept of being-unto-death sponsors the idea of faith in God as the giver of eternal life which depends upon the conduct of our life. We work hard to earn immortality.

e. Heidegger's authentic attitude to death

Death brings human existence to an end and so completes it, but no one can experience his/her own death. For Heidegger death is "that possibility is one's own most, which is non-relation and which is not be outstripped" (Heidegger 1962). Death is *Dasein*'s own most possibility in that it most intensifies the fineness of existence. Death is a non-relational possibility because no one else can substitute for me with respect to my death. It impends as something that strips away all relations to others. We mostly relate to our own most, non-relational possibility by feeling in the

face of it by living out inauthentic modes of Being—towards death. We tend to think of it as something that will happen but not yet. No one dissents from the proposition that everyone will die. This is seen as a well established empirical fact. Mainly each of has our own, and own our own death to die. Ordinary, each of us want to avoid the fact that we have our own, and only our own life to live (Heidegger 1962).

This is the core insight of what Heidegger understands to be an authentic attitude to death. Authenticity does not demand the actualization of the relevant possibility. Suicide is not even a mode of Being—towards death. Authenticity demands that we live expecting death to come at the very next moment. Death would overwhelm rather than provide the background to our existential choices.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. Give a brief explanation of “Being-unto-death”?

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2. How should human being respond to death authentically?

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3.4. THOMAS NAGEL’S VIEWPOINT OF DEATH

Nagel was born of a Jewish family on July 4, 1937, in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia). After his studies at Oxford in 1960, he pursued his PhD from Harvard University in 1963 under the supervision of John Rawls. Before settling in New York, Nagel taught briefly at the University of California, Berkeley (from 1963 to 1966) and at Princeton University (from 1966 to 1980)..

Nagel is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and his *Mortal Questions* (1979) gained wide notice for its examination of a number of the central themes of human existence, including death, sexuality, and socio-political issues. Nagel's quest for ‘a philosophical method that aims at personal as well as theoretical understanding’ was fulfilled by the book's success in combining analytical rigor with a breadth of appeal to common experience. The humane orientation of his work was sustained in *The View from Nowhere* (1986), a compellingly lucid analysis of the tensions between the subjective and objective aspects of intellection and identity; the quasi-instinctual desire to achieve objectivity is seen as fundamental to the central preoccupations of philosophy in the course of the wide-ranging development towards a concluding treatment of major ethical problems. Other works by Nagel include *What Does It All Mean* (1987), a stimulating survey of nine essential topics for beginners in philosophy, and *Equality and Partiality* (1991), in which he discusses questions of justice.

a. Thomas Nagel's Viewpoint of Death

Thomas Nagel begins his collection of essays with a most intriguing discussion about death. Death being one of the most obviously important subjects of contemplation, Nagel takes an interesting approach to define the truth as to whether death is, or is not, harmful for that individual. Nagel does a brilliant job in attacking this issue from all sides and viewpoints, and it only makes sense that he does it this way in order to make his own observations more credible. He begins by looking at the very common views of death that are held by most people in the world, and tells us that he will talk of death as the permanent end to our existence.

The first view that Nagel decides to discuss is the view that death is bad for us because it deprives us of more life. Most people are of the view that life is good even though they experience bad events in their lives. Sometimes tragic is also a very positive state. Nagel goes further to point out some important observations about the value of life. Nagel gives the example of death and being in a coma before dying. Both of these situations would be equally bad situations.

Looking now at what is bad about death instead of what is good about life, Nagel presents some obvious thoughts regarding this point. Life is good because we have the conscious ability to experience and appreciate all that life has to offer. So death is bad because it deprives us of these experiences, not because the actual state of death is bad for us. The next point that Nagel makes is that there are certain indications that show how people do not object to death simply because it "involves long periods of nonexistence" (Nagel 1979). We do not look at the state being before we are born as a misfortune, or deprivation of life, because that life has not yet begun and, he refutes the possible argument that the person could have been born earlier and had more life, with the fact that if that person was born substantially earlier, he would cease to be that person, but instead someone else entirely.

b. Three Problems about Death

Nagel discusses next three problems. The first is a view that there are no evils that are not rooted in a person consciously "minding" those evils. Nagel puts this view in to easier terms by saying that this is the same as saying "what you don't know can't hurt you". There are several examples that can illustrate this theory. People who think this way would say that it is not harmful for a person, if he/she doesn't know about it. If he/she doesn't experience evil, it is not bad for him/her. In the view point of Nagel, if we do not experience death, it will not hurt us. But I feel that death always, in one way or other way, hurts people, though we do not experience it.

The second problem is that there are special difficulties, in the case of death, about how the supposed misfortune is to be assigned to a subject at all. Harm can be experienced by a person before death; nothing can be experienced after death. So, when is death itself experienced as harm? When does he/she undergo it? So as long as a person exists, he/she can not experience death and once he/she has died, he no longer exists.

The third problem deals with posthumous and prenatal existence (Nagel 1979). Contemplating the good or bad aspects of death, Nagel observes that we must look at the possible circumstances surrounding a death, and the pertinent history of the person who dies. This is important because we miss a lot that is important to the argument if what we take into consideration is exclusively

the state of the person at the moment of death. Nagel gives an example of a very intelligent man sustaining an injury that causes him to regress to the mental capacity of an infant. His needs can be fulfilled like those of an infant and he kept happy as long as simple needs are met. His family and friends would look at this as a terrible misfortune, even though the man himself is not aware of his loss. This situation is unfortunate because of the deprivation of what might have been had he not been injured in this way. He could have gone on to accomplish great things for the world and his family, and live out his life through old age as an accomplished and acclaimed individual. This would have led him to great happiness, but it can be observed that this same man in a state of mental capacity to match that of a child is also happy, but Nagel agrees that what happened to this man is a tragedy because of the terrible loss of the life the intelligent man could have led. This situation can relate to death in this way of thinking about deprivation. Death is bad because it robs you of what could have been.

After making these observations, Nagel states that there are endless circumstances and happenings going on that affect a person's fortune or misfortune. Many of these never coincide directly to the person's life. We must consider that there is no way to pinpoint the exact position of a misfortune in a person's life, nor a way to define the origin. People have dreams and goals in life that may or may not be fulfilled. There is no way to find all of the circumstances and possibilities that go into whether or not these hopes and dreams are eventually fulfilled, but Nagel tells us that we must simply accept that "if death is an evil, it must be accounted for in these terms, and the impossibility of locating it within life should not trouble us."

There are some who view the time before birth and the time after death as the same. We exist in neither, though Nagel argues that there is a difference. This whole essay has expressed exactly his view that though we do not exist in either case, death deprives us of time that we could have been living our lives. Nagel makes an interesting observation about whether we can assign as a misfortune an event or aspect of life which is normal to all humans in general. We all know that we all will die and that the maximum amount of life is somewhere around 100 years. So is it still plausible to say this is a misfortune? We are brought into this world and brought up with aspects of our lives that we appreciate. The deprivation of these things that we learn to appreciate is a misfortune, because we have learned to live with these privileges. It is unfathomable for a human being to grasp the concept of a finite life, in the truest meaning of understanding. We do not think of our lives right now as a set out plan or a finite sequence of events. We do not live day to day thinking of what we should do according to how much time we have left. Our lives are essentially an open-ended sequence of good and bad circumstances and possibilities. Death is the abrupt interruption of this sequence that we cannot help but be in the mindset will never end. This is how death is a deprivation, and ultimately, a bad thing for a person.

In conclusion, Nagel offers a good argument in his essay on "death" - death itself is harm. Whether a person believes in the immortal life or not, it must still be considered that dying deprives us of the goods and experiences of life. This view seems unavoidable (Crawford 2010). There is obvious disagreement about the fact of death. Some people may think that death is dreadful; others may not have objection to death. Thomas Nagel wants to ask whether death is in itself an evil; and how great an evil, and of what kind it might be. The question should be of interest even to those who believe in some form of immortality, for one's attitude towards immortality must depend in part on one's attitude toward death.

c. Death is an Evil

If death is an evil, it cannot be positive features, because it deprives us what we have. Thomas Nagel tries to deal with the difficulties surrounding the natural view that death is an evil because it brings to an end all the goods that life contains (Nagel 1979). Especially death deprives humans' desire, activity, goal, and so on. A person who dies at age 92 has lived a full life to the best of his ability and has experienced more than someone who dies at age 32. The person dying at age 32 had many things that he/she wished to accomplish and experience in his/her life, and since the event of death has taken away all possibility of any of these goals coming to pass, and undermines all the work that he/she has put forth up to that point in pursuit of his/her goals, death is a terrible tragedy for him/her.

First, the value of life and its contents does not attach to mere organic survival; almost everyone would be indifferent between immediate death and immediate coma followed by death twenty years later without reawakening. And second, like most goods, this can be multiplied by time: more is better than less. There are two other indications that we do not object to death merely because it involves long periods on nonexistence (Nagel 1979). First, as Nagel has been mentioned, most of us would not regard the temporary suspension of life. I think that it may be true, because our earthly life is not permanent or eternal. As soon as one is born he/she starts to count the final day of his/her life. It is undeniable. Second, none of us existed before we were born (or conceived), but few regard that as a misfortune. The point that death is not regarded as an unfortunate state enables us to refute a curious but very common suggestion about the origin of the fear of death. It is often said that those who object to death have made the mistake of trying to imagine what it is like to be dead.

The first type of objection is expressed in general form by the common remark that what you don't know can't hurt you. It means that even if a man is betrayed by his friends, ridiculed behind his back, and despised by people who treat him politely to his face, none of it can be counted as a misfortune for him so long as he does not suffer as a result. The death of Keats at 24 is generally regarded as tragic; that of Tolstoy at 82 is not. Although they will both be dead for ever, Keats' death deprived him of many years of life which were allowed to Tolstoy; so in a clear sense Keats' loss was greater. However, this does not prove that Tolstoy's loss was insignificant. The fact that it is worse to die at 24 than at 82 does not imply that it is not a terrible thing to die at 82. The question is whether we can regard as a misfortune any limitations, like mortality, that is normal to the species. Blindness or near-blindness is not a misfortune for a mole, nor would it be for a man, if that were the natural condition of the human race.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What are the main insights of Nagel on death?

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2. How do you respond to Nagel's view that death is evil?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

Here we have seen different views of death, including that of Martin Heidegger and Thomas Nagel. Though people have divergent views and perspectives on death, everyone has to encounter death in her own life. So our challenge is to live an authentic life. Each one is invited to discover the meaning of life and death in her own lives.

3.6 KEY WORDS

Dasein: Dasein - is a German word and is sometimes translated as "being-there" or "being-here" (da combines in its meaning "here" and "there", excluding the spatial-relational distinction made by the English words; Sein is the infinitive, "to be"). It is the human person, who is aware of her existence. Mostly it is not translated at all.

Sein-zum-tode: Being-toward-death, or *Sein zum Tode*, represents the finite nature of life. This belief that death *defines* life. It is a typical Heideggerian usage.

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UNIT 4 COLLECTIVE EXTENSION OR COSMIC EXTINCTION

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- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Species Extension
- 4.3. Cosmic Extinction
- 4.4. Collective Species Transformation
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- 4.6. The Choice Is Still Ours: But Not For Long!
- 4.7. Let Us Sum Up
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To present before the students the two crucial choices facing us.
- To become aware of the need to collectively make the choice for ourselves.
- To see various reasons for our extinction and extension.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago the French philosopher and scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, described human being as “Evolution become conscious of itself.” Today this profound definition has become dated due to the tremendous technological progress. Nowadays we can define human beings as “evolution capable of extending or eliminating itself.” Human beings are essentially a social being and is expressed through his culture. Today the culture is progressing so radically that the very defining of human being cannot be understood apart from the cultural evolution, that is characteristic of human life in an emerging global community. Along with the cultural transgressions, humans have evolved so awesomely, in the technological (robots, computers, artificial intelligence) fields enabling them to create virtual reality that is capable of shaping the human destiny. Some scientists talk today of a “transhumanist” future leading to a the emergence of a new species guided by human beings. Further recent developments in genetics and the successful completion of Human Genome Project has enabled humans to take life into his/her own hands by guiding, fostering and even eliminating evolution. The danger of our own extinction caused by ourselves cannot be overlooked! So we first begin analysing how human being can extend (or enhance). Then we shall take up some possibilities, by which humans can destroy the whole of life from the precious planet. Finally, we end this unit, by urging us to make a conscious and collective choice for life.

4.2 SPECIES EXTENSION

Fifty years ago Pierre Teilhard de Chardin described human being as “Evolution become conscious of itself” (Teilhard de Chardin 1999). Today after so much of technological and moral evolutions, we can extend this understanding. At present human beings can be understood as “Evolution become capable of consciously extending or eliminating itself.”

In this unit we would place before the students the mind-boggling alternatives that humanity is confronted with: that of either enhancing ourselves collectively or annihilating ourselves totally. We argue that as moral and spiritual beings, humanity as a whole has to make today a decisive choice consciously, collectively and freely.

In the first part of this unit we show that today the cultural and sociological dimension of human life has evolved so complex that from individual objects, each one of us is evolving into complex cultural ménage with much more profound religious, social and scientific implication. In the second part of this unit we deal briefly with the technological advancement that has placed before us the decisive choice, which will be elaborated in the next two sections. The first choice of collective species transformation is not necessarily placed as a positive one. The second one of collective self-annihilation is a threat to humanity as well as to life. We deal with some reasons (natural and artificial) which make the choice possible and crucial for us.

The next section only raises some philosophical questions. We believe that the answers to these questions are both complex and multifaceted. Even before arriving at answers, I believe that posing the questions properly is the first philosophical requirement needed to cope with today's cultural and technological advancement.

Because philosophy and religion have significant roles to play in shaping the destiny of humanity, it is important for us to realise that raising the questions and living with these questions is the beginning of the process of solution. So no attempt is made to raise solutions that humanity faces. At the same time after realizing the gravity of the situation, we can suggest some criteria that could be very important in encountering the questions and opting for the answers that will determine our very destiny.

Because of the very nature of the argument, the data presented is very sketchy. The questions raised are also not elaborate. But it is hoped that this article will at least raise some serious philosophical questions on issues that are central to being human today. The prospects of being human today, we believe, lies in raising these questions and wrestling with them and only at the next level in finding solutions to the questions.

a. Cultural Advancement

Never has human beings lived as pure independent individuals. So the basic insight of sociology is that humans are essential “social beings.” None can become or remain a human being apart from the family, community or society that constitutes and enables him. Still one of the liberating factors of modernity has been the rediscovery of the individual or person as the ‘focus’ of social and cultural life. Modernity emphasized the role of individual and that of person as the basic constituent of the society. Because of that humans became aware of the fact that the society cannot sacrifice the rights of the individuals for a long time. Though the society may demands the curtailment of the freedom of the individual in emergency situation, that cannot be the

normal way of living. So humans today talk of the need for self-realisation, personal growth and individual assertion of one's rights. Many of the fundamental inalienable rights, including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights have been based on the assumption that the individuals should be given free space to grow.

Within the span of the last thirty years things seem to look drastically different on many accounts. Today humans tend to attain a collective, cultural and multifaceted identity that is definitely different from the tribal or collective identity of the "primitive human beings." Some of the ways humans extend their horizon of self or identity are;

From individual to cultural identity: The first commonly accepted extension is through cultures. Humans create the culture collectively and the culture in turn forms the individuals. In the course of time the culture may overpower the individual entities and may at times even suffocate him. But in general the individual growth is intimately linked to that of the culture. As the culture evolves, the individual growth also advances. From biological to collective evolution: at a still deeper level the biological or physiological evolution, of which we are all part of, is moving beyond the strictly biological to a collective evolution. The physical traits are transmitted genetically and the process of biological evolution has been known to humans from the time of Charles Darwin. But today human capability, human aspirations go beyond that of his or her biological aspiration. One's own meaning system, values and identity itself is determined by the social and global phenomenon which is much larger than the cultural phenomenon discussed in the previous paragraph.

From individual to corporate identities: With the emergence of well established city states with well-defined boundaries, this extensions of individuality takes on a new turn. An individual soldier, for example, is not even a "cog in the wheel" compared to the defense establishment. A private individual does matter to a nation, but the larger interest of a nation can easily be scarified for the personal interests of the ordinary citizen. Going one more step, the multi-national corporations (Korton 1995), that have become so powerful in the last three decades have redefined the workers as a collective entity. Today the individual identity seems to be either merged or even overpowered by (sometimes even anonymous) collective identity of a sect, nation or corporation.

From biological to cybernetic identities: Another dramatic extension of human beings' identity is made possible through technological innovations. Going beyond the classical understanding of technology as "extension of human senses," today's technological marvels allow us to go beyond the limits imposed on us by our materiality. Today's cybernetic and biological technologies (like robots, cyborgs, coupled with nanotechnology and biotechnology) enables human beings to drastically redefine themselves. In the process of such redefinition of themselves, they are going beyond the classical understanding of human self. The human being who are "best fitted," will thrive in such situation and in this plane the human self advances with the help of technology. The obvious danger is that humans identity may become superfluous and the cyborgs may take over human destiny!

Going beyond the truism that human beings are essentially social beings and expresses themselves through cultures, today we note that culture is changing so globally and so rapidly,

that humans have no time to cope with it (Toffler 1974). Today the cultural entities – and the human self – are progressing so radically that the very definition of human being cannot be understood apart from the cultural revolution in the emerging global community. Globalization, together with technological progress, effects today a culture that transcends anything that the humanity has even seen! The radical changes and progress that we encounter in every sphere of human life (and culture) along with their global impact almost make the very definition of human being obsolete. Not only are we not used to the “future shock” that technological era bring with it, but we are also in the very process transformed without being informed by it.

b. Technological Progress

Along with the cultural transgressions, humans have evolved so awesomely at the technological level. The marvel brought about by technology – be they aeroplanes, communication media, information technology, nanotechnology – is so gigantic that people living just hundred years ago could never have imagined the life style of the present generation. The stupendous developments in transport, communication and mass media has brought about tremendous changes to the way that we perceive ourselves. Our very self-identity is dramatically altered by the technology at our disposal.

But today with the arrival of artificial intelligence and ushering in of virtual reality, we have gone far beyond the simple understanding of technology as a human tool. Today technology enables us to create reality according to our own making. The classical distinction between “the given” and “the made” is getting blurred. The difference between the “natural” and “artificial” has also become ambiguous. Today we are in a position to create virtual reality that is capable of shaping the human destiny, to degrees unimaginable in the past. To a limited extent at least, we have become creators of our own reality, masters of our own destiny and shapes of our human nature.

In spite of the fabulous technological progress, Einstein’s assertion is still valid: “All our lauded technological progress – our very civilization – is like the axe in the hand of the pathological criminal.” (Einstein 2009). That is a pity! At our disposal is the technological wonder that can almost make anything. But our human heart – the realm of values, vision and spirit – remains very “primitive.” Again the visionary statement of Einstein is valid: “The release of atomic energy has not created a new problem. It has merely made more urgent the necessity of solving an existing one” (Einstein 2009). We may be able to restate this and affirm that in spite of the technological progress, the basic problem is at a moral or spiritual level and we have not been able to handle it. We have not learnt to remedy our moral and spiritual backwardness and this is extremely dangerous given the technology at our disposal.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is Teilhard de Chardin’s understanding of the human person? How do you reformulate that definition for today?

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2) What are some of the implications of species transformation?

4.3 COSMIC EXTINCTION

Confronted with the fact of unbridled technological progress and moral stagnation, the danger of our own extinction caused by ourselves cannot be overlooked! Without trying to appear apocalyptic and promoting doomsday arguments, we should still be able to look with a sense of realistic objectivity. We shall be very brief in this section and try to point out areas which may lead to our own self-annihilation. Humans could become extinct. Launch of nuclear weapons, an outbreak of disease, an unforeseen side effect of technical and medical advancements, or unusual environmental changes are the main causes of human extinction. Here, I enumerate the possible disasters in the future.

a. John Leslie's *The End of the World*

John Andrew Leslie (born August 2, 1940) is a Canadian philosopher. He was educated at Wadham College, Oxford, earning his B.A. in English Literature in 1962 and his M.Litt., in Classics in 1968. He is currently Professor emeritus at the University of Guelph, in Ontario, Canada. In his famous book "*The End of the World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction*", he argues that there is a significant probability of a disaster on the Earth, which is relatively in the near future. Mainly, the disaster would cause the extinction of human life. He argues in two stages. In the first stage is the disaster which is made by humans and the next is a non-human made disaster (Leslie 1996).

b. Non-Human Made Disaster

John Leslie calls attention to possible disasters which could cause the extinction of the human race. Leslie probably knows more possible ways in which human life might be eliminated than anyone else in the world. He reviews a wide range of possible causes of disaster which do not depend on human activities. There are, for example;

- A nearby supernova - a stellar explosion perhaps equivalent to that of a hundred thousand trillion-trillion mega ton H-bomb.
- Essentially unpredictable break down of a complex system, as investigated by 'chaos theory'. The system in question might be Earth's biosphere: its air, its soil. Its water and its living things interact in highly intricate ways. On a very long timescale it might be the solar system itself, because planetary motions could be chaotic.
- Other massive astronomical explosion produced when black holes complete their evaporation or by the merger of the two black holes or two neutron stars, or of a black hole and a neutron star (Leslie 1996).

Of course, while a collision with a comet is not something that human activity causes, conceivably human effort could prevent such a disaster which would otherwise have occurred.

Mass extinction events, like the wiping out of dinosaurs 65m years ago, are impressive and dramatic, but account for only around 4% of now extinct species. On the other hand, the majority slip away quietly and without any fanfare. Over 99% of all the species that ever lived on Earth have already passed on, so what happened to the species that weren't annihilated during mass extinction events? (Ravilious 2009).

A few other reasons may be enumerated:

- Another biological reason leading to our possible annihilation is perm counts. Reduction in male sperm count may indicate severe telomere erosion and it could be an added reason for the elimination of human species.
- Coming to the cosmological level, the occurrence of a supervolcano and the arrival of extreme ice age leading to Iceball Earth could lead to our death.
- Further, in about 3 billion years, the Andromeda Galaxy is expected to collide with our Milky Way galaxy. In about five billion years the Sun's stellar evolution will reach the red giant stage, in which it will expand to engulf the Earth. Before this date, its radiated spectrum may alter in ways Earth-bound humans could not survive.
- Finally, in the very long term the ultimate threat to humanity may be entropy, with the postulated heat death of the universe predicted by the second law of thermodynamics, or other endings caused by physical constraints (Leslie 1996).

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Briefly discuss some of the reasons for the end of the world?

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2) Is cosmic extinction a realistic possibility? Give your reflections.

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c. Human Made Disaster

The second causal factors do depend on such human activities. These factors are include items such as human industrial and agricultural activities, research in theoretical physics, war, and systems of human beliefs. The disasters might result from some unintended event, something highly toxic and highly infectious to the human society. Disaster could result from unexpected consequences of deliberate acts of some human beings. Small changes in complex systems can have unpredictable consequences. If human existence depended on the continued functioning of some such system, the disintegration of the ecosystem would spell the end of human existence. Here Leslie gives some of the reasons of collective human extinction such as;

- Human population tends to increase geometrically over time, so that a historical graph of world population produces a Malthusian slope. Over population is the main cause of the deterioration of the environment which may lead to global warfare.
- A disaster from nanotechnology-very tiny self reproducing machine could be developed fairly soon and it might spread worldwide within a month in a 'gray goo' calamity.
- Disaster associated with computer-it initiated nuclear war is the one often discussed. There might be a breakdown of a computer network which had become vital to humanity's day-to-day survival and computer replaces us and humans become more and more computer controlled. An advanced computer might be superior to humans.
- Some other disaster in a branch of technology, perhaps agricultural is dangerously dependent on polluting fertilizers and pesticides and progressively fewer genetic varieties.
- Also chaos theory warns us that any very complicated system and in a particular system involving new technologies interacting in a complex manner might break down in an essentially unpredictable fashion. So a small change in complex systems can have unpredictable consequences (Leslie 1996).
Mainly Leslie states that if Doom were to strike in about AD 2090, then it would be because of population growth. Also many writers considered such things as the dangers of nuclear war or of pollution..

Conscious Reasons for Annihilation

Unlike natural reasons for our own demise, there are human-made reasons which could lead to our own annihilation. Since many of these reasons are so obvious, I am not going to dwell on them elaborately. The first candidate is obviously war: Warfare, whether nuclear, chemical or biological in the scale of World War would easily lead to the demise of the whole humanity.

Other reasons that could see ourselves wiping out of existence are:

- Universal pandemic involving a genetic disease, virus, prion, or antibiotic-resistant bacterium.
- Famine resulting from overpopulation (see Malthusian catastrophe)
- Long term habitat threats resulting in environmental collapses
- Catastrophic climate change as a result of global warming or the effects of extensive deforestation or pollution.
- Genetic engineering and manipulation resulting in an (advanced human) species unable to inter-procreate, accidentally resulting in actual (rather than pseudo) extinction.

In view of these phenomena, "The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement" with their motto "*May we live long and die out*" tries to accelerate the process of our extinction both scientifically and religiously! Public discourse is an unassailable obligation.

4.4 COLLECTIVE SPECIES TRANSFORMATION

Scholars such as Nick Bostrom (2008 & 2008) and Hans Moravec (1988 & 1999) argue that humanity will eventually be supplanted and replaced by artificial intelligence or other forms of artificial life; while others have argued that humanity will inevitably experience a technological singularity, and furthermore that this outcome is desirable. They see the technological change dynamically and positively. In fact, they see that technology can cure us of our illness (both physical and even mental, leave alone spiritual) and could be a contributing factor to eliminate

the natural reasons for human extinction. On the other hand technology could be the source of going beyond ourselves to a level unimagined in the past (Bostrom 2008).

Some scientists go even further and talk today of a “transhumanist” future leading to a the emergence of a new species guided by human beings. Further recent developments in genetics and the successful completion of Human Genome Project has enabled humans to take life into his/her own hands. By proper use of genetic, information and nanotechnology, they feel that we are at the threshold of a new era in human life. By guiding, fostering and even (hopefully not!) taking evolution into our own hands, we can go guide and accelerate the process of evolution according to our designs. Cloning and Human Genome Project coupled with computer and nanotechnology give us a unique position, where we are in a position to create life according to our design. They also provide us with both artificial intelligence and virtual reality which makes human existence far more noble and even spiritual. So according to these scientists we are on the verge of transforming ourselves collectively into posthumans or extropians. So they dream of a possibility when humans will transform themselves and take hold of the evolution to their own advantage.

Though many of these dreams are utopian and illusory, I do believe that they have a point to make. Technology, we are capable of controlling and modifying evolution. Biologically we are capable of intruding into life in ways totally unimaginable in the future. The robots and cyborgs of tomorrow will definitely transform the way we think, feel and reality and in the process we will be able to create a new reality for ourselves. The distinction between the real world and artificial world is getting blurred. Though the dream of creating a new species may not be achieved, human being are in a position to alter significantly and positively the flow of evolution. So without getting into the bandwagon of posthumanists, we can still appreciate the possibilities offered by science to enhance human life and extend life-span. To the extent science can relieve us from unnecessary pain it is a noble enterprise.

So the future that awaits us is both frightening and promising. Science can truly help us to attain a future that is more human and authentic. It can also, as pointed out in the earlier section, offer us the frightening prospect of complete annihilation of life. We stand at a crisis point? Where will science take us? What will we humans decide for ourselves? To take these issues seriously science needs to dialogue with religious and philosophical streams of thought.

4.5 POSING SOME PHILOSOPHICAL CHALLENGES

Confronted with the crucial possibility of collective annihilation or enhancement of human beings, made possible by scientific and technological advancement, we are in search of both adequate questions and answers. The bewildering technological possibilities force us to revise our very questions to ourselves, besides challenging us for new answers. The philosophical implications of these for our understanding of the human person are mind-boggling. Some of the crucial issues and questions that emerge are: Who will speak for (human) life? In such a pliable atmosphere, what is really human life? Then there are still more basic issues: What is life? Who owns life? How far am I responsible for my life? How far are we collectively responsible for our human life? Can we humans claim responsibility for the whole of life? Still more pointed

questions arise: Can some corporations determine the collective destiny of humanity based on the sole criterion of profit?

Further, wider issues and concerns rise: What is a human being? What is human nature? In the context of the cultural and virtual extension of human species, can we still meaningfully speak of nature and nurture? Going one more step ahead, we can ask:

What is the human society? Humans have become much more shaped by the society than earlier. Can we at all speak today of human individuality, dignity and situate him apart from the social structure that shape him?

What is nature? Can we still afford a dichotomized view of nature? Should we not evolve a philosophy that takes into account the various dimensions of life and attempt an integral understanding of life, which includes also human life?

Finally in this context self-appraisal of the role of philosophy and religion is important. So the question: What is the new role of religion, philosophy? How does it affect human activity?

The answers to these questions are multifarious and involved. That is precisely the significance of philosophical concerns. Because we do not have simple solutions to these profound questions, we just cannot ignore the questions. The questions – along with it the attempted answers – are too important to be ignored. The future generation depends on how we choose to pose the questions (leave alone attempting to answer them). So for a philosopher raising these issues and bringing the concerns to the level public discourse is an unassailable obligation.

4.6 THE CHOICE IS STILL OURS: BUT NOT FOR LONG!

The essay has made it abundantly clear that today humanity, both individually and collectively, is in colossal crisis and are confronted with a radical choice. The first thing we need to realize as humans beings and as philosophers is to realise the seriousness of this crisis without either ridiculing it to oblivion or exaggerating it to doomsday!

After having realistically and critically assessed the choice between us, the second step is to ask if we humans are capable of responding to this crisis consciously, collectively and responsibly. Here lies precisely the greatness and frailty of being human today! Without burying our head in the proverbial ostrich manner can we face the problem squarely and dare to ask the questions that are indispensable?

We are truly happy that we humans being can make a choice: for ourselves and for the rest of life. We can assume the role of the spokesperson for the larger family of life. But we must remember that this choice will not be available to us for long time. The choice is *still* ours, but will not be with us for too long! So the imperative to pose the questions and respond to them urgently. We are sure that humanity has the spiritual wisdom and the moral conviction to make a collective, creative, coherent choice. A choice based not solely based on profit, nor on progress, but for humanity, for life! Let us not leave the decisions to a few individuals (the so called

‘experts’)! Humanity has a collective stake and we humans must collectively decide on it, not only on our behalf but also for the rest of living beings. In making this choice for ourselves, we can contribute a little to the flow of life that takes place in and through us.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What are the crucial choices humanity faces today?

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2. For a philosopher, “public discourse is an unassailable obligation” Why?

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have offered the two possibilities facing humans today: either that of total extinction of life or that of enhancement or extension of life. We humans are capable of both. That is our greatness and also our weakness. The choice is before us now!

4.8 KEY WORDS

Collective Extension: The glorious possibility that humans can by their technological, moral and spiritual power enhance (or extend) life on the planet earth. Even the possibility of humans becoming another species (Transhumans or Posthumans) is not ruled out.

Cosmic Extinction: The possibility that humans can annihilate ourselves and even possibly destroy every trace of life from the planet earth.

Doomsday arguments: Calculation of statistical probability for the total extinction of human species, based on various arguments and reasons.

Species transformation: The hope that we humans will be able to bring about another species, by their own technological innovation.

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