

Extending longevity beyond the biological clock and the Dorian Gray syndrome

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The human life expectancy is higher today than ever before. In many Western countries, it is over 80 years old. In Japan and Spain, the average age is 83. Social well-being and advances in health are the main determinants of this longer survival. However, new challenges have arisen that affect the elderly above all, derived from biological deterioration in the different organs and tissues (*Short et al. Geroscience 2025*), a process known as frailty. Among other manifestations, senility manifests with neurocognitive impairment and increased risk of cancer. What can we do to live longer while keeping good health?

Unrestrained enthusiasm for “wellness” testing has spawned a marketplace of direct-to-consumer genomics, broad laboratory panels, wearable sensors, and whole-body imaging that outpaces supporting evidence. Such low-value diagnostics contribute to the huge and growing costs of health care while exposing patients to false-positive cascades, anxiety, and bias. As highlighted by Eric Topol and colleagues, spending on unnecessary testing and futile interventions is the wrong way to move personalized medicine forward (*Ho et al. J Gen Intern Med 2026*).

The Dorian Gray syndrome

There are people who are obsessed with maintaining youth and physical beauty. Often, they resort to cosmetic surgery, anti-aging medications, and lifestyle adoption in attempts to delay aging. It is somewhat of a psychiatric disorder. The term comes from the novel “*The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” by Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), in which the

protagonist remains young and beautiful while his portrait ages and reflects the effects of his moral decay over the years. The book caused quite a stir in Victorian society. Wilde extolled pleasure and feelings over the moral duty of Puritanism.

The Dorian Gray syndrome is not officially recognized as a disease in psychiatric manuals, such as the DSM-5, but it is acknowledged in association with body image disorders, where the person does not accept the natural signs of aging. Other diseases of physical self-perception are anorexia (*Soriano et al. J Eat Disord 2025*) or gender dysphoria (*Soriano et al. AIDS Rev 2025*).

The Dorian Gray syndrome has also been linked to narcissistic behaviors, focused on appearance and social perception. The abuse of social media has increased in frequency (*Weinstein A. Front Psychiatry 2023*). In addition, there are medical risks from undergoing repeated cosmetic surgeries or anti-aging medications (senolytics), almost always experimentally, in a desperate quest to maintain youth.

The denouement of Dorian Gray is tragic, reflecting the connection between outer beauty and inner corruption. In the end, consumed by the guilt and horror he has become, he decides to destroy the portrait, thinking that by doing so, he will also be able to free himself from his corruption. By tearing the painting with a knife, an extraordinary paradoxical exchange occurred: the portrait returned to its original appearance, showing Dorian as young and beautiful. On the contrary, his body suddenly aged and acquired the grotesque traits that reflected his vices. With all this, the book symbolized that one cannot escape

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the consequences of selfish and immoral acts, even if one retains one's external appearance.

The boredom of not aging

Dorian Gray becomes more selfish as time goes on, while his loved ones grow old and die. His timeless, unnatural existence leaves him feeling extremely lonely. The appeal of savoring moments fades. There is nothing that I have not experienced. How boring to be immortal!

In the film *"In Time"* (2011), by Andrew Niccol, a future dystopian world is described where time replaces money. It is earned and paid from the age of 25, in minutes, days, or years. Only a few remain immortal, at the expense of the rest who die prematurely. However, there is a centenarian who questions why he does not die after a long life and decides to put an end to it by donating his remaining years to a young man. Niccol is the director of *Gattaca* (1997), another interesting science fiction film that explores eugenics through genetic selection in a hypothetical future society.

Is there a biological clock?

As creatures, we are made to be born and die. In humans, there is a biological limit of around 120-125 years (Pyrkov et al. *Nature Comm* 2021). As discussed by the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Venki Ramakrishnan, in his book *"Why we die?"* (2024), some elderly people die from everything and nothing serious. It is as if the light is gradually extinguished, until darkness reigns.

Advances in biotechnology have been a strong stimulus for geroscience, with the identification of molecules

that slow down and/or reverse cellular and tissue aging (Lyu et al. *Aging* 2024). However, aren't we forcing our nature by extending our existence with false elixirs of life?

Perhaps we can live longer, but not in the same way or better. Our spiritual nature, with our noblest aspirations, would hardly adapt to an immortal body. The recognition of earthly life as a gift and the desire to reciprocate require the temporal stimulus, that *"tempus fugit"* which, indirectly, allows us to glimpse a different eternal life.

From 18 to 20 February 2026, the World Longevity Forum will take place in Madrid, Spain. It is an international meeting that, for the 4th year, will bring together researchers and clinicians from all over the world to update the advances in healthy longevity. The defenders of *"Frankenstein"* strategies by creating cyborgs or performing transplants, or genetic manipulators, have fallen into disrepute.

Healthy longevity is about physical exercise, optimal nutrition, fulfilling human relationships, a sense of life purpose, and emotional well-being. It aligns with human flourishing, as promulgated by Tyler VanderWeele, the Harvard University professor who coordinates the global study examining the determinants of happiness (VanderWeele T. *Nature* 2025). With increasing life expectancy, many are reaching old age. Wouldn't it be better to consider that the unavoidable experience of loss of faculties and dependence can provide a further unique opportunity to grow as human beings in the twilight of our lives? In other words, instead of obsessing over avoiding natural death, it is worthwhile to pursue flourishing even at the end of life (Symons et al. *Theor Med Bioeth* 2024).