

CRISPR Offers the Potential to Live Forever, But to What End?

Chinese scientists have successfully prolonged the lives of mice by using CRISPR.

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Due to the unique consequences of the pandemic, we are able to catch a glimpse of a potential future. One where we sit, plugged into our computers, devoid of physical human connection. What will society look like after the pandemic? Will we continue to stay isolated? Surely advancements in technology have played key roles in prolonging our lives, allowing us to continue to “work” and “socialise,” but to what end? With these newly emerging technologies are we destined to live forever, in a suspended state, in front of the glow of our 4k computer screens? Will gene editing technologies be used to keep us alive forever so that we can binge watch infinite Netflix shows, send meaningless emails and scroll through social media feeds?

Living a healthier and longer life

The Institute of Zoology of the China Academy of Science has successfully prolonged the lives of mice by using CRISPR/Cas 9. CRISPR has become a relatively simple and popular way to edit strands of DNA. The CRISPR/Cas 9 study found a gene tied to cellular senescence (which tells cells to stop growing) and also, that CRISPR/Cas9 treatment can make partially dormant

the aging process. CRISPR/Cas9 treatment allowed mice to live 25% longer and be physically stronger. Biologists see these results being relatively easy to reproduce on humans in a clinical setting.

Existing in a world where individuals are able to receive treatment to live longer borders dystopian science fiction. The treatment can reduce the need for medical attention by potentially reducing injuries, heart attacks, and organ failures.

In part, due to breakthroughs in the tech and science industries, life expectancy in the 21st century is projected to steadily increase. In a study published in the Lancet, average life expectancy is predicted to rise in 35 industrialized countries by 4.4 years in men and women by 2030.

Life expectancy will likely increase as we migrate away from laborer positions. Currently, the National Center for Health Statistics puts unintentional accidents, primarily happening within labor positions, as the third leading cause of death in the U.S. Many industrialized countries, like the U.S., have been witness to a slow disappearance of the labor class, but the pandemic has made that increasingly more apparent. Businesses are shifting towards automated technology to replace physical human interactions to curb the spread of Covid-19. Even within agriculture and farming industries, already abundant with machine automation, companies are pushing even further away from human labor in an effort to reduce virus rates.

Becoming the perfect machine

Simultaneously, we are witness to the emergence of new and remote jobs and work settings. Homes are new sites for schooling, work, and entertainment. Before the pandemic, there was already a struggle to maintain a separation between home

and work identities. The pandemic has exacerbated this problem. How do we find rest and recuperation when we are living within the office space? Time on the job stretches on forever as we receive work emails while watching Netflix with our families. If life expectancy in humans gets extended by using CRISPR/Cas 9 are we just creating our own version of purgatory? Is our future one where our time working stretches on seemingly infinitely while we simultaneously cease to age? Are we becoming the perfect machine, one that is held together by technological advancements that inadvertently disembodify and dehumanize us?

Was society slowly transitioning toward isolation before the pandemic? Is isolation a byproduct of neoliberalism? Gated communities, mass incarceration, office cubicles, segregation in neighborhoods, retirement homes, hospitals, national borders and private properties all verify how neoliberalism operates. Now we are being asked to isolate ourselves within the confines of our homes. When the pandemic is over, will people continue to order food, work, shop, and socialize from isolated and often virtual spaces or will we be able to shift back into the more public and physical? Will the last remaining physical laborers, those that are delivering goods to doorsteps, be replaced by driverless vehicles?

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