

Reflecting on Man and Immortality

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Editorial

Life seems to be a highly infrequent phenomenon in the Cosmos, and more so the emergence of technology-creating species. Indeed, the idea that Earth might be one of a very few planets in the Universe where a technology-creating civilization has arisen, does not seem inconceivable to me.

The first unicellular organisms appeared on our planet some 4 billion years ago and evolved at a very slow pace. It took evolution 3.5 billion years to give rise to the first multicellular animals endowed with a complex nervous system. Technology-creating intelligence emerged with the genus *Homo*, some 2.5 million years ago, the blink of an eye in the cosmic calendar. This remarkable achievement of evolution required that during a very long time (4 billion years) our planet kept its exceptionally favorable life-supporting conditions. Even so, the modest, by cosmic standards, changes that took place on Earth throughout that time span caused the extinction of over 97% of all the species that ever lived on the planet. One particular species, *Homo sapiens*, that represents a tiny fraction of the surviving 3%, thrived and dominated the planet to an extent that no other species achieved before, not even the dinosaurs, who ruled Earth for 150 million years. Indeed, being a member of the human species is an almost unimaginable privilege. Everything within us is a

coincidence bordering on the impossible. The atoms of our bodies were created thousands of millions of years ago in the heart of ancestral stars, thousands of light years away. We are a portion of the Cosmos that has become conscious and can know itself, marveling at what it sees through our eyes. We could go on with this kind of considerations and everything will take us to the growing certainty that being alive is a unique and unrepeatable occurrence. This is why death is a tragedy for the individual; it dispels the miracle of our existence, consciousness and memories lost forever.

If we lived indefinitely, we would not be immutable as stones, we would steadily change and our view of the universe would continuously evolve. But we would keep our identity and memories. It would be like when we transitioned from childhood to adulthood. We remember our childish ideas about the world with tenderness and a smile. Our perception of reality was simple and naïve, very different from our adult views. We evolved yes, but there is an unbroken continuity between us and that child; our sense of identity remains unchanged. In contrast, death terminates that identity, dissolves our mind and brings an irreversible decay to our bodies.

The longing of Man for immortality and eternal youth is universal and time immemorial. It is in our nature and we will always seek to defeat death or at least postpone it

indefinitely. In the past, men hoped to live forever through religion; now we are beginning to undertake the conquest

of immortality through technology, the hallmark of our species.

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