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# Homo universalis

Evolution, Information,  
Rekonstruktion, Philosophie

Erhard Oeser zur Feier  
seines 70. Geburtstages

Herausgegeben von  
Stephan Haltmayer, Franz M. Wuketits  
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## Do We Have to Die?

*Şafak Ural*

We don't hesitate to answer this question by „yes“. One of the explanations of this answer which comes to mind first is that like all living things we are programmed by this way. For, like all living things we too get older and at the end of getting older death is following as an inescapable consequence.

Getting older is a genetic fact. The time-clock in us works unstoppably towards the aging of the cells. Although it can not be predicted why this clock works differently for different people, and when it will stop, the fact of death is programmed genetically.

Another answer to the question „do we have to die?“ can be given in terms of free radicals. Free radicals are produced as the result of the daily functions of our body-life. These radicals are removed usually by antioxidants. However, as we get older, enzymes' ability to produce antioxidants diminishes. As a result of this diminishing incurable damage occurs to the cells. Apart from this, lessening of the hormone production responsible for different tasks is another factor for the sequence of the fact of death. In short, such factors prepare the death of a living thing at the level of cells.

Illnesses are considered among the other factors of the realization of the fact of death.

Such reasons could be increased in number; in fact, other reasons, unknown today, can be found in the future. But in order to talk about the fact of death, there is one particular concept we have to use. That is the concept of time.

In order to speak of the death of a living thing, there is required a passing time, and the so-called fact ought to take place on a time-arrow. That is, a process will start with birth, time should pass and at the end the fact of death has to be realized. In other words, there are starting and ending points on the time-arrow which correspond to the facts of birth and death and between these two facts there is a time passing.

From this point of view, it can be said that time is the reason of death. Time, without doubt, does not have the same properties as the other reasons of death; but nevertheless, it is impossible to explain the fact of death without using the time factor.

Time is a concept we have to use in order to refer to the facts of aging and getting older, besides the fact of death.

„Aging“ and „getting older“ are two concepts which are to be separated; and they have to be taken into account while answering the question „do we have to die?“.

We can use the fact „aging“ as including biological, chemical and physical processes, and the fact „getting older“ as referring to cultural, psychological and social characteristics. In the explanations of death, these two should be taken into account as two separate properties.

Besides the differences between these two concepts, it will be proper to mention a common property. This common property is that both the fact of aging and the fact of getting older are related to the concept of being individualized.

Individualization is defining a historicity for an object or thing. An object can be distinguished from the others by its history; in other words, by this means we have the opportunity to regard an object as an defined individual. We can think of this situation as assigning a special time to the individual. Hence, „time special to the individual“ means the history of that individual. Eventually, assigning a history can also be regarded as the individualization of time. An object can be distinguished from the others by being individualized, by being specialized, that is, by the history special to it.

A starting point chosen on a time-arrow will also be the starting point of the history of that individual. Such a history is a time special to the individual; it is its special time. Besides, this is also essential for speaking of an object's aging or its getting older. In other words, in order to speak of an object's aging (and its getting older) there is required that it has a history. Only the objects/beings with individual histories can be regarded as individuals and we can only in these cases speak of their death.

There is no getting individualized where there is no history, and thus, an aging process for the individual can not be defined. As an example, let us suppose five identical fish living in an aquarium. When one of them dies, we replace it with another identical fish. In such a case, we can not speak of the aging of the fish in the aquarium from our point of view. For they have no distinguishable characteristic for us. If fishes get individualized; that is, if a beginning point is assigned for each of them and thus an individual history is created for each one, then we can speak of aging. In other words, if we have a fish called Wanda, then we can talk about its birth date, its individual history, its aging and its death.

I assigned Wanda a history; so from now on according to me, it is an individual which has a personal history. Personal history can be created by the individual himself as well as by an outsider. However, what concerns us here are some of the relations living beings have with the species to which they belong. Each living individual in nature is a member of a species. Each individual survives by using its instincts and the information it has attained from the

environment throughout its lifetime. From this point of view, aging is the acquisition of new information. The personal history of such an individual is built upon its experiences in a duration of time. An important feature of such a duration of time is that it is highly necessary for *the species to continue its existence*. For this individual history, that is the information and the experience he has attained in time will be transferred to the future generations.

The learning capability of each individual which is special for its own species means its adaptability to the new environmental conditions and its resisting to the enemies and to the diseases. It can be noted that it is possible to define such a process as aging. An individual who is not aging is one who is not changing. Such a property can not be a positive property for the species. The meaning of the process of aging for the individual is surely different from its meaning for to the species.

From the species' point of view, the individual by itself can not be said to have a meaning. Individuals don't have meanings according to their history for the species they belong. Therefore, aging is not a meaningful concept for the species; because what is important for the species is the permanent existence of the fish in the aquarium. For what is wanted from the individual is its adapting itself to the environmental conditions, its resisting against illnesses and enemies, that is, its transferring the information it has attained to the next generation. In short, in spite of the changing conditions, continuation of the existence of the species is wanted.

However this aim, that is, the ability to exist permanently is a property which can only be attained by the mortality of the individual.

While it is necessary for the individuals to learn new things in order to survive, that is, they have to age, the species on the other hand should not lose its ability to learn, that is in a sense, it should always stay young. From the point of view of the species, learning ability is the ability to evolve.

Evolution is a concept which has been discussed a lot and interpreted in different ways. If we leave the philosophical discussions about it apart, we can conceive evolution as the adaptation of living things to their environment in a duration of time.

Such an adaptation occurs, without doubt, not from the perspective of the individual but of the species. The change of the individuals in the processes of aging and getting older does not mean evolution. In other words, individuals do not evolve during their process of change. Evolution can only be mentioned for each and every species itself.

Then it seems that it is not possible to mention evolution in case the relations of the species form up with one another are considered as a whole. Because the environment simply changes, that is all. The change that takes place in the environment, as it is seen in our time, may also point at a corruption. The species get differentiated as a whole in order to adapt to this differentiation, or

whatever else we may call it, that is, to adapt to a change that cannot be evolved in the environment. Such a change can be interpreted as an „evolution“ only for a specific species: the species has changed in order to adapt itself to the new conditions; in a sense, it has evolved.

In their changes, however, the species are in interaction with the species they are fed by and feed as well as the environment. Then, if the species that are related with one another are considered as a whole, they cannot be said to evolve with respect to one another. There can only be a harmony between them. A species to show a change different from the other species that it interacts with, that is, a species to go out of the harmony among the species it interacts with (its becoming disharmonious with the sources of food, its not being able to feed, that is) means that the species in question fails to evolve within itself and disappears as a result.

*In order for the species to evolve individuals should age.* Because aging for the individuals (that is, the physical, chemical, biological processes they spend from birth to death) is indeed necessary for them in order to be protected against diseases, to get adapted to the environment, to change and to continue their development. In short, it is necessary for their existence. To put it differently, the processes undergone by the individuals as of their births actually have the task of evolving the species. *For an individual to age is a process which provides the necessary conditions for the evolution of the species.* If individuals did not age, it would be impossible for the species to have generations to fight with the diseases and to adapt to the environment. In that sense, the aging of the individual provides the development of the species of which it is a member, its evolution, its having the adaptation ability, its variation and eventually its existence.

Evolution is development in a sense, that is, while being protected from changing environmental conditions, at the same time being able to adapt oneself to them. For that, individuals should transfer their experiences as well as the information they get from the environment to the next generations. Each new experience, each new information the individual attains from the environment is a piece of information for it to transfer. If individuals did not mature this way, evolution of the species clearly would not be possible. And the species whose individuals did not change would obviously fail to survive.

In order to adapt to the changing environmental conditions, individuals with adaptation capacity, that is, new individuals who have diversity and different characteristics from the previous ones are needed. The process of aging means the accumulation of information which will be transferred to the next generations. However, the process of aging does not mean the acquisition of new genetic qualities by the individuals. The new individuals are required in order to take over the old information, to adapt to the new conditions and to be

the food source of other species. Aging is what the species wants from its individuals.

Individuals can only exist within a species. Because they can reproduce, thanks to the other individuals in that species. The acquisition of new information by the individuals that makes the continuation of the species possible means getting mature. The individual, all through the time period between his birth and death, undergoes the phases of maturing necessary for the continuation of the species. What is perceived as „aging“ on the outside is in fact maturing, a phase that is necessarily gone through and reached.

In order to get adapted to their environments, the species have to evolve. Such a change is necessary for the continuation of the species. What changes is not the individual in his lifetime; the individual only matures. New individuals with qualities different from the past ones are needed in order to get adapted to the new conditions. In order for such a adaptation to be achieved there will be a need for the individuals – those with qualities different from the earlier ones – to transfer the acquired experiences. The acquired experience and information need to be transferred to the new individuals in order not to get lost and disappear in any way. So, the process of maturing, that is the storing of information, and new individuals who will receive this information are needed in order for the species to continue.

From the social point of view it is necessary for the individuals with consciousness to have their *personal histories* as much as it is necessary to have species for the existence of the individual from the biological point of view. First of all, consciousness of the individual is meaningful only because of his personal history. This personal history mainly involves all the memories of the individual. Personal history is what makes an individual an individual. Each individual differentiates himself from other individuals through his own personal history, thus his consciousness. In a society, what makes an individual an individual is the unique consciousness, memories and experience of that person, his personal history in short.

*Species is a condition of existence* for the living organism whereas *historicity*, the transmitter of the memories unique to the person, is the condition of *individualization*. Individuals are differentiated from the other individuals of their species owing to their memories, their own historicities. One aspect of individualization is the transfer from the natural, unprivileged condition to a different and privileged condition. This takes place in a social environment. For only a social environment can provide the individual with a privileged condition. This privilege may not, of course, mean superiority. Yet, each individual lives in a space which is unique to himself and distinguishes him from the other individuals. He needs this space. The only requirement of being privileged is the construction of a personal history.

Personal history or individualization, as mentioned above, includes not only „the process of aging“, but also „the process of getting older“. In order for the species to continue its existence and characteristics the individual should age. From the social point of view, he should get older. For only in this way, the individual can play a role in the society. From the historical, cultural, economic and social aspect, he needs such a process.

„Aging“ is a process necessary for the species to continue its existence. „Getting older“ on the other hand, is a process necessary for the individuals with consciousness to define their own individualities and, thus, place themselves in a privileged situation.

The answer to the question „do we have to die?“ should be handled in the framework of physical, chemical and biological processes. However, the question, in one sense, is related to the meaning of the concept „death“. For the concept „death“ is not related only to the biological, chemical or physical aspects of a single living being. Each living thing belongs to a specific species and has some expectations from the individuals of that species.

Many living things live collectively, that is in a social organization peculiar to them. It is a reality that these relationships affect the individuals in a variety of ways. Therefore, when we ask the question „do we have to die?“, the fact of death gains meaning in the framework of social, cultural, historical or theological contexts. *If we did not have concepts such as time and history, the fact of death would be no more than an ordinary transformation.*

In fact, an eagle's or a lion's catching his prey seems to us as a struggle of life. We do not feel the cold face of death in this process at all. In this sense, death is a process or a transformation of shape. Death is meaningful for us only if it has a reference in our memory. We can speak of the death of an object which we individualize. In this sense, death will acquire a meaning other than the biological meaning of „not being alive anymore“.

To have to die is a result of man's individualization, his having a history or, to say it differently, his wanting to see himself in a privileged situation.

Individualization is realized within the sphere the individual hides his instincts and egoism, a sphere that he designs for himself, feels privileged and wants to be in, that is, within his own historicity. Assigning a history is also a precondition for defining the fact of death. In other words, in order the species to continue its existence individuals should exist. Existence of the individuals is the precondition of the existence of the species. This happens by the continuous regeneration of the individuals. From the species' point of view, this regeneration does not imply the dying of the individuals. On the contrary, the life of the species is based not on the fact of death, but on the fact that its individuals live. Being assigned a history opens the door for speaking about the fact of death.

### 3. Zu Erhard Oesers Werk