

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Asking The Unaskable Question – Do People Have The Right NOT To Die?**

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#### **Introduction**

In order to provide anything of value to the discussion over life and death and the staking of claims as to ‘rights’ attributable to either element of the spectrum, I have decided that the key thing for you the reader to appreciate is my personal assessment of the rules governing life in pretty much any form. What I detail for you below is a set of Key Assumptions about the very essence of what it is that enables life to emerge in its various states. For the majority of the members of the species *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* (1) (the one who knows they know) – you, me, people in the street and so on, the key assumptions take the form of a short set of rules for life stated to be the following:

For life to exist an entity must

- Rule 1: Do whatever it takes to survive until it is established
- Rule 2: Once established, extend its survival boundary in anyway it sees fit
- Rule 3: If the pressures to undertake the actions required to successfully enact Rule 2 become too great, apply all of its energies to achieving Rule 1
- Rule 4: At some point, switch off Rule 1

For the average human being, these rules are hard-wired into our internal operating systems and we might look back to the moment of our conception to discover that those rules have

been driving our behaviour as individuals and as a species every since our genetic material first began replicating itself. Being hard-wired, the 'Four Operating Rules for Life' do not offer us 'choice' - these rules run on automatic pilot. We have NO alternative options that can be selected. Our genetic material fights to survive, establish itself, enhance its environmental existence and finally die. That is what genetic material does best. For life to exist in any form I take it at face value that these four rules MUST be in operation and as such I am able to observe an array of entities which both exhibit 'life' and an array of entities that though having the appearance of being 'alive', are not.

The above position creates a paradox for human beings. Our conscious awareness has, over time, enabled us to learn that we have 'choice'. What we typically fail to grasp however is that not only are those choices limited, they are also restricted to actions that do not violate the 'Four Operating Rules for Life'. As a species our consciousness has allowed us to make observations, then create superstitions and through them, practises of behaviour and through them, social mores, tenets and laws for societies to be established. Whilst we have been highly successful at creating the 'illusionary appearance' of having an ability to choose, we have yet to address the reality of the limitations of those choices due to the hard-wired nature of the 'Four Operating Rules for Life'. Quite the contrary – as a species we spend much of our waking lives attempting to prove that our choices are in fact 'unlimited'. This paradox – being hard-wired and limited in choice, yet having a consciousness that allows us to make choices on our own behalf and on behalf of others, is one of the key drivers for understanding the 'life and death' challenges we face.

## **‘Sugar N Spice And All Things Nice – That’s What Little Girls Are Made Of...’**

The ‘Four Operating Rules for Life’ concept ‘dips its hat’ in part to the material covered in the work of Richard Dawkins’ ‘The Selfish Gene’ (2) and ‘Unweaving the Rainbow’(3) among others. In both of these books the underlying tenet is that it is our genetic material and an individual gene’s attempt to survive through self replication that is the underlying driving force behind life. And with that I largely agree and accept that it covers much of what is required for Rules 1 and 4 outlined above. The ‘sugar and spice’ of which little girls are made (along with the ‘snips of snails and the puppy dogs tails’ that make up boys) are metaphors for a vast array of genetic material that help shape much of who we are.

But to believe that Rules 2 and 3 are also defined by the same ‘sugar n spice’ approach of our genetic makeup does a disservice to the consciousness we have developed over time as a species which is where I move away from Dawkins’ take on genetic material (along with the ideas contained in ‘The God Delusion’ (4). The rather stark fact is that our genetic material must at some point, navigate its way through a social construction experiencing intermingling with groups of other people, and do so in ways that the vast majority of people in those groups believe are acceptable methods for that intermingling to occur.

Our hard-wired operating code for life requires us to shift our focus of purely selfish intent defined by Rule 1 (do whatever it takes to survive) to focusing on navigating our way through a world in which we are required to negotiate our Rule 2 needs (once established, extend your survival boundary anyway you see fit) with others who also have their own hard-wired operating codes for life guiding much of what they do. This negotiation process enables us to

‘expand our survival boundaries’ beyond the day by day (or minute by minute) existence, until our lives generally become less exposed to the risks and sudden disruptions common in the early stages to a life, toward the greater comfort seen at the more established stages.

And here is where we expand our views beyond the selfish gene approach to one in which we understand that life in most of its guises requires an ongoing adaptation by individuals to the behaviour of other individuals. In order to expand our understanding, I suggest that the ways in which Rules 2 and 3 operate in the world is explained by the work of Clare W Graves (5) and the subsequent iterations of Clare’s work by Beck & Cowan (6) in establishing a ‘Values Systems Framework’.

At its core, the Value Systems Framework, also known as the Spiral Dynamics model, is a framework which identifies a series of human interaction dimensions – the strategies by which we undertake the ‘negotiations’ required of us by our hired-wired Rules 2 & 3.

What the Value Systems model (7) shows explicitly is that the ways in which people choose to negotiate their survival boundaries have well established, identifiable and consistent themes that ultimately determine the method by which an individual prefers to ‘negotiate’. Without going into a massive amount of detail, the model suggests that there are two core threads in terms of how we negotiate with the world, and that for each of those threads, there are increasing levels of complexity and operational choices. The two core threads are:

- ‘Try to get the ‘world out there’ to give me what I want’ and
- ‘Adapt my behaviours to best fit with what the world requires of me’

This means that any negotiation aimed at achieving Rule 2 or that respond to the life conditions that see Rule 3 enacted, are likely to see an individual expect the world to give them whatever they ask for; OR are likely to see an individual comply with whatever the world asks of that individual.

The Value Systems model shows that typically more complex approaches will emerge for each of the threads which means we see the 'give me what I want' thread shift from 'egocentric guilt free selfishness' through to 'egocentric 'smart' manipulation of people and resources' through to 'obtaining what I desire by assisting the whole system along the way such that all others also benefit'. The 'adapt my behaviours' thread moves from 'stick together following rites of passage established by the elders' through to 'obey the dictates of the higher authority' through to 'work to establish a shared group consensus incorporating as many opinions as possible to benefit everyone'.

It is important to fully appreciate the implications that arise from this very brief overview of the Value Systems model. Knowing that people have a preferred means of 'negotiating' their way through life means we know that they are likely to attempt to extend their survival boundaries in ways most suitable to them which does not mean that they'll act in ways that are necessarily most suitable to others. The result is that you have ongoing debate, confusion, varied individual and social responses and even hostility to assessing the question over a 'right to life' perspective or a 'right to die' perspective. Conscious awareness has enabled us to develop a wonderful tool called 'choice' and 'choice' is at the root of all discussions over a 'right to die' or a 'right to life'.

The Value Systems model suggests that people choose differently because they have differing 'negotiating' strategies which also mean different points of view. In fact

we can identify that ‘lifestyle’ issues and actions to support lifestyle issues are now beginning to hold sway over ‘life’ issues as resources, research and effort is being placed on life extension and enhancement therapies at a time when survival issues for many remain unresolved. Soon we will see that another point of view needs some very serious consideration.

Consciousness brought an appreciation of life by making us aware of death. I’d like to suggest that an awareness of death is closely linked to our awareness of time, and specifically the passing of time. Societies with a penchant for ‘marking the dates’ of time and for constant references to history are not only societies with a focus on death, they are likely to be societies driven to prevent it. And when members of those societies still have the physical ability to be driven by Rules 1 & 2, they will undertake any step possible to delay and prevent Rule 4. (8)

### **Creating Choices When There Are None**

Up to this point I’ve developed the perspective that the ‘Four Operating Rules for Life’ are hard-wired into us and that there are no other options we have, whilst also showing that because we are by and large social beings with conscious awareness, we tend to negotiate with others in order to achieve the requirements set for us by Rule 2. Let me quickly add that no one is obliged to negotiate, it’s just that most people have learned that overall, some form of co-operation and give and take tends to be far more successful in achieving the requirements set for us by Rule 2

By indicating that the modes of our social interactions can be tracked by the Values Systems framework we now have a greatly enhanced awareness of the way in which the ‘life and

death' questions are tackled by society. But the paradox outlined earlier about the illusory nature of 'choice' still exists!

How then do human beings cope with the conscious idea of choice over life and or death, whilst knowing deep down in our very bones, such a choice is illusory?

The ways in which our conscious awareness manifests itself in addressing the requirements sets by Rule 2 – 'extend your survival boundary', (specifically the ways societies cope with 'life and death') are wondrous, laudable, creative, confronting and as you'll see, ultimately flawed.

### *The Creation of Superstitions, Gods and Religions*

For millennia or more, one of the more popular approaches our species has developed for dealing with life and death has been the personification of seemingly natural phenomena. People created stories, chants and rhymes which led to a consistency of rules of behaviour (what we might today be inclined to refer to as 'superstitions') and from those rules of behaviour we established cultural mores and procedures for groups of society to negotiate extensions of their survival boundaries.

To see just how embedded 'phenomena' based themes exist in our societies, how many of the following are you familiar with:

'Red Sky at night, sailors delight...'

'Ring a ring a rosy, a pocket full of posy...' (9)

What happens if a Black cat crosses your path?

The calm before...?

The Four horsemen of...?

If you could relate to two or more of those listed, your psyche is well in synch with superstition and historically derived phenomena based explanations.

As our species developed greater awareness of their surroundings, our ancestors began to give certain natural events a 'human' quality in an attempt to better understand those events. The pantheons of Gods (10) are wonderful examples of our ancestral attempts to understand the world in which they live. 'Thor' God of Thunder; 'Mars' – God of War; 'Diana'; 'Athena'; 'Sol'; 'Vishnu' and many others are all attempts by our ancestors to explain or understand their surroundings. For 'Life' and 'Death' personifications we have terms like 'Mother Earth'; 'Father Time'; and 'the Grim Reaper'.

The personification of natural events is what established some of the first series of social behavioural codes. By giving an event some quality of human-ness, our species created a means by which we could share stories and explanations for why certain things happened.

The personification of natural events ultimately gave rise to the most widespread life & death coping strategy in the world – the rise of 'religions' and the formal coding of societal behaviours based on the dictates of the behaviours of observable 'acts of Gods'. People with the best skills at observation of natural phenomena (people arguably having a greater conscious awareness than those around them) gained standing in the community and became known as shamans, priestesses, sages, oracles and so on. These people were seen as the ones who could translate the forceful and powerful acts of Gods (storms, lightening, floods, red moons etc) into required behavioural responses for the masses.

Some of the well known responses were 'sacrifices' to the gods, the building of great temples, offering of gifts, tributes and so on. These responses became rites and rituals, habits and then formal laws by which a society and its members were expected to behave. One of the great rites of behaviour is what people did with their dead and how they celebrated



new life. To understand just how successful formal religions have been in coding societal behaviour, one need look no further than to see that not much is different in our response to life and death today than it was millennia ago.

What I find interesting about rites and rituals is that they were (and very much still are) aimed at either appeasing a version of some deity so that the loyal group might survive better now, OR creating an environment in which the recently deceased might continue their journey onto another world. This second aspect should be important to people who discuss 'right to life' or 'right to die' issues. It is my belief that when a deceased was buried/burned/lay to rest along with a collection of trinkets to make the deceased's transition smoother or more tolerable (11), what the living were doing was NOT so much recognising the death of someone but instead attempting to extend the deceased's life.

Although the deceased had (through whatever means) finally enacted Rule 4 of the 'Four Operating Rules for Life' and switched off Rule 1 (do whatever it takes to survive), the living, still driven by Rules 1 and 2, acted on behalf of the deceased in an attempt to extend their life. The primary outcome then is the belief of an afterlife or more accurately, an 'extension' of life and this is an obvious attempt to extend our survival boundary (Rule 2) and deny the existence of Rule 4 – 'switch off Rule 1'. At a conscious level we fight against what we know in our bones to be the reality: that a life has ended.

#### *Colours, Scents and Cotton*

Societies around the world exhibit other behaviours aimed at denying the existence of Rule 4. Probably the most pervasive of these are multi billion dollar industries used by billions of people around the world EVERY single day – the 'beauty' and 'fashion' industries.

The fashion industry is still firmly entrenched in attempting to make people look more attractive by draping them with an assortment of clothing. Over the years, fashion tastes change and the industry both encourages and responds to shifts in public perceptions of clothing. By comparison the beauty industry is a subset of the 'denial of death' approach seen in the 'life ever-after' theme offered by most religions. The original purpose for makeup was not so much a denying of death but to make someone look 'more alive'. The use of lip and eye colouring mimicked the changes in skin tone and colour that were a result of increased blood flow and increased blood flow is nothing if not an indicator of a heart beating strongly. And a strong beating heart is a sign of vitality (also a sign of a life form that is a long way away from death) and 'vital' people are attractive people.

The beauty industry then has been heavily focused on creating an image of people with greater vitality and therein further from Rule 4! The scents on offer also were an attempt to make someone more attractive either as a masking agent of poor hygiene or even disease, or as means of adding to the overall qualities by using scents seen as signs of health, such as certain plant types like flower perfumes or 'outdoors' based aromas. Patrick Suskind's work 'Perfume' wonderfully captures the level to which perfumes and natural human smells pervade our lives. (12)

But over recent years we have seen a noticeable shift in the industry. It has moved its focus away from 'beautification' towards what I call 'youthification'. Youthification is a process that has emerged because our fear of Rule 4 has become so great, offering makeup as a means of creating an image of vitality and therein 'life' is no longer sufficient. Instead of merely providing colour and smell enhancement the industry has realised that the masses are no longer appeased by the usual offerings for beauty, the industry now focuses its attention on making people 'Younger'.

The search for an 'elixir of youth' is not a new one. The annals of history are filled with stories of the many travels and attempts to discover the answer to eternal life (13). The beauty industry's focus is now entrenched at overcoming every conceivable sign that ageing is occurring. And not just trying to minimise the facial life lines of 50 or 60 year olds. Any sign of ageing is being positioned as something to be avoided so we now have 30 year olds being told that they are on the road to the grave!

And so we have Botox injections (14); Collagen (15); Peptides (16); Essential Oils (17) and more as examples of the types of products being pedalled to the masses concerned with the slightest of wrinkles or dry skin. In some instances the marketing shows the 'lab coat' researcher explaining the benefits or we are told of the 5, 9 16 or 38 different signs/causes of ageing! Surprisingly enough the most significant cause of ageing – 'time' is never mentioned. That is because the products are an attempt to ward off time and therein deny any element of the possibility of death.

Because we are sentient beings and are aware of the passing of time we are also acutely aware of the more personal and biggest implication that arises from the passing of time. At the subconscious level we understand that younger people are by default (all things being equal) further away from death. In shifting towards 'Youthification' the beauty industry moves closer to offering the 'elixir of youth' because it is the next strategy societies use to deny the outcome of Rule 4 – people die!

#### *Art & Culture*

Popular media and mainstream culture through the ages have devised treatises, artworks, films, poems, songs and plays in an attempt to deal with the question over life and in particular eternal life or the quest for the 'fountain of youth'.

I won't cover all of them here other than to suggest a handful of examples worth looking at: Michelangelo's 'The Creation of Adam' (18) and Cranach's the elder's 'Fountain of Youth' (19) are wonderful paintings; films like the 1986 'Highlander' (20) with a wonderful soundtrack that poses the question 'who wants to live forever?'(21); 'The Big Chill' (22) 'Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café' (23); In addition there is the book (and subsequent film) 'The Time Machine' (24) by HG Wells and 'Frankenstein' by Mary Shelley (25). All of these examples look at aspects of creation, life, immortality and death. One book I find particularly appealing is the Carlos Castenda book 'The teaching of Don Juan' (26) which explains four enemies a person must deal with along the journey of life – 'Fear', 'Clarity', 'Power' and 'Old Age'. In the end we learn that there is one enemy we cannot overcome.

But popular culture, beauty products and religion are very much socially driven responses to life and death issues. As our species has become smarter (but not necessarily wiser) (27) we have begun to harness our ability to create 'technical' rather than 'social' solutions to help us enact Rule 1 whilst denying both Don Juan's enemy 'old age' and the fourth of the 'Four Operating Rules for Life'.

#### *Enter the Lab Coats*

These technological approaches (in no particular order of significance or introduction) include Cryonics, the process of freezing dead people for later resurrection (28), assisted abortion of early stage pregnancy (29), assisted suicide or Euthanasia of critically ill persons (30), Assisted conception in the form In vitro Fertilisation (IVF) (31), assisted organ repair through heart lung transplants (32), disease control and prevention through an assortment of drug therapies (33), cellular repair emerging through stem cell research (34) the use of mechanical labourers called robots (35) and genetic manipulation in order to select more preferable

characteristics of a living organisms across an array of species (36). *Oryx & Crake*, a work of fiction by Margaret Atwood is an exceptional example a scenario looking at the combination of genetic manipulation, stem cell research and organ transplants (37). The subtext running through the novel questions the wisdom of some of our technology uses as we search for ever more ways to enhance our lives – what I’ve been referring to as ‘extending your survival boundary’.

One of the more controversial technology applications our species has devised is the use of refrigeration units for long term storage of whole or parts of deceased persons. Referred to as ‘cryonics’ (so much nicer than ‘deep freezing the dead’), with one of the first major works in the field emerging in 1962 through Ettinger’s ‘The Prospect of Immortality’ (38). The underlying intent is that people who have died of an as yet incurable disease are placed in frozen storage in the hope that at some point in the future at least two things will happen:

- First, that a cure to the disease to which the deceased had succumbed is found, and
- Second, that somehow the future generations work out how to actually jump-start the dead and bring them back to life

Cryonics is a delightful example of the power that our consciousness has provided (choice) and how we do whatever we can do to continue achieving the objectives of our hard-wired Rule 1 (do whatever you can to survive) whilst denying the finality of Rule 4 (switch off Rule 1).

Assisted abortion on the other hand tends to work in the opposite direction. The issue here is that choice is applied to enact Rule 4, rather than extend Rule 1. The means by which assisted abortion occurs is numerous and I choose not to detail them all here other than to say that methods of both

a mechanical and chemical nature exist (39). By the way, I use the term 'assisted' quite deliberately because most research suggests that the majority of pregnancy terminations occur automatically and form a natural part of a menstruation cycle. (40) Assisted Abortion is an act geared at enabling the already living to extend their survival boundary (Rule 2) and may or may not be driven by Rule 3-like life-conditions coming into play.

Assisted suicide (sometimes referred to as Euthanasia) (41) is closely aligned as a theme to assisted abortion. The operational difference seems to be that the decision to enact Rule 4 is chosen by a person on behalf of themselves, rather than making a decision on behalf of a yet to be born entity. On the surface, assisted suicide can appear to be the opposite process of the cryonic theme with one approach choosing to end life deliberately, whilst the other is trying to extend life. However there are a number of examples where people seeking to utilise Cryonics, chose to terminate their own life before the disease terminated their life. (42)

Where we've identified assisted abortion and assisted suicide, we should also point out that 'assisted creation' and 'assisted birth' exist to balance up the life and death ledger. Caesarean section and In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) are two of the most significant steps we've devised as a species to enable life to continue. These methods see medical intervention to either deliver a baby where natural birth seems risky to either mother or baby, or in the case of IVF, to enable the formation of an embryo where natural fertilisation through sperm and egg are overly difficult.

In the case of assisted birth we are seeing some very clear examples of the 'lifestyle' mindset holding sway over the 'life' mindset (43). In other words, there are more and more examples where women are opting for a Caesarean delivery because it fits in with their busy lifestyle needs, rather than

because they require medical assistance to ensure healthy delivery – ‘lifestyle’ versus ‘life’.

In the case of assisted conception the IVF technique has moved out of the domain of enabling younger infertile or semi fertile couples to conceive into domains where the technique is being used by gay couples wanting to have children and older women late to the ‘childhood’ table. (44)

Heart Lung transplants have been a common medical procedure for a couple of decades and are a fine example of human intervention into the likely death of an individual. Often the individuals in question start off having just one organ impacted, but with the increasing stress on the healthy organ, it too begins to succumb. (45) As we have developed increasing medical skill we’ve become better at working in support of Rule 1 and working against Rule 4. Yet even here we see the life versus lifestyle positioning for despite the high costs involved in the procedures, the difficulty with finding suitably matched donors and the shortage of people donating organs, we are faced with supplying these very precious donations to people who’ve engaged in one of the worst forms of self harm invented – smoking cigarettes.

Life versus Lifestyle. Who gets the donated organs - the non smoking poor farmer from a 3<sup>rd</sup> world country with five children to feed or the affluent smoker who has the money to pay for the procedure? Believe it or not, these choices are being made every day.

Many technical applications are spilling out of their original intended area of focus (‘to improve the quality of life’) and are beginning to find applications that align themselves more to our desire to extend our survival boundary anyway we can (Rule 2) and importantly, to stave off death.

Ray Kurzweil, the well known science fiction writer, inventor and futurist commonly discusses the idea of human augmentation, the process by which mechanical means enhance the operating sets of a human. These applications include robotic limbs, enhanced muscle support and improved cognitive abilities aided by amazing software and increasingly complex computer chips which are beginning to bridge the carbon/silicone border. In this way the emergence of the 'trans-humanist', the 'beyond' human entity arises. We've already seen how Cryonics helped kick start the idea of transhumanism and there are a number a websites, books, articles and groups that discuss the subject. (46)

What I find fascinating about all of the methods above (and they are by no means conclusive of all our existing behaviours) is that they are at best, illusions and at worst delusions. Our ability to generate ideas, new technologies and processes has given us 'visions of grandeur' that see many members of our species hunting for, creating, promoting, selling and buying methods by which they can perpetuate their individual lives.

For each of the methods cited above, there are and have been proponents and detractors, calls for research investment and calls for moratoriums. What we see are the Value Systems clashes where one method is deemed acceptable to some yet abhorrent to others. And amongst all of the debate, passion, fear and concern is the question we've yet to confront.

The combination of Rule 1 and conscious choice has given us the belief that we might somehow be able to override the final of the four hard-wired 'Operating Rules for Life' – 'At some point, switch off Rule 1'. I am not suggesting that as a species we ought give up our search for a better quality of life or discover any means to extend the length of our lives. But (and it is a big 'but') if we continue to be impressed by how clever we are, and fail to embrace the need for wisdom,



we dig ourselves ever deeper into a hole from which we cannot climb.

And wisdom only comes from asking the right questions!

The variety of approaches now use in by most societies around the world to help them cope with 'death' are examples of our conscious attempts to distract us from the real issue - but at some point we must as a species confront the question we've yet to ask.

### **Asking The Unaskable Question**

Does anyone have the right not to die?

The challenge I have with the existing common approach to the debate over 'right to life' or a 'right to die' is that they are often positioned as a continuum and polar opposites of that continuum. Just because we have ignored the real question, it does not mean that there is a continuum of 'Life OR Death' and that the supposed 'rights' of individuals and societies in such contexts actually exist.

What I wonder is at what point in time we will focus our efforts on the real question. At what time will we honestly recognise that we are driven by different Value Systems and that we choose to negotiate our way through the world by doing whatever we can to extend our survival boundaries? At what stage will we recognise that as a species we focus our energies heavily to the personal drivers of Rule 2 but do so at a time when others of our species are faced with Rule 3 requirements that confront them with Rule 4 outcomes? Just how wise are we as a species and as societies when we choose lifestyle over life?

We are now in the position that we have technology being used to enhance and extend the lives of those who can afford

to pay for it (or resurrect them if a cure for their disease is found) whilst allowing millions of people to die of preventable water borne diseases. When all is said and done, does Darwin's 'fittest' actually come down to mean 'wealthiest'? Rule Two suggests that it might.

When it comes to a 'right to life' position, do the lives of poorer people count? When it comes to assisted suicide, does it cheapen who we are? I don't have the answers. But I do not see the questions being asked in the debate between right to life and right to die proponents.

In the science fiction film ZPG – Zero Population Growth (47) the driving question that formed the structure for the film was the supposed quality of existence of society caused by increased population on earth. But the question over the right **not** to die was not explicit because the context for the film's setting was one in which the world's population growth had led to a massive increase in pollution and an inability to sustain all life. Instead the issue was couched as a question over a 'Right to bring new Life' into the world and that anyone breaching the 'no births' policy would be subject to death. Again we see an inability for society to tackle the real question, focusing instead on new life.

Another science fiction film released in 1976 'Logan's Run' (48) came far closer to addressing the question head on. Based on the 1967 novel of the same name, the film's pretext was that life was generally great for everyone, until you reached the age of 30 at which time you would be exterminated! We were asked to determine a society in which the judgement criterion was based purely on age. Logan's Run is one of the closest examples of popular culture asking the unaskable question – do we have a right not to die?

Are questions over an ever increasing population growth and the apparent associated problems caused by that growth looking at the problem from the wrong direction? Is the issue not so much about growth of population but the reduction in the number of deaths? Could a 'too few deaths' perspective, highlight our need to address the question as to whether we have a right NOT to die?

So, does anyone have the right not to die? What we are seeing with various approaches to dealing with death, especially in the augmentation, stem cell, cryonic, trans-humanist arena is an attempt to extend survival boundaries as a means to prevent death from occurring. Our societal focus on medical cures for an assortment of genetic disorders is our attempt to stave off the outcomes of Rule 4.

But at what point do we begin to address the more global issue of finite resources, planet degradation, lack of water, starvation, waste, species extermination and other big picture issues? How long can we, as individual members of various societies continue to ignore the down stream and 'down-the-time' impacts of our behaviours by seeking ever more ways to deny death?

At what point and under what criteria do we begin to answer the question – do we have a right not to die?' What might the trigger point be? Might it be a simple resource issue where choices of funding for medical therapy must be made between a frail older person or a frail younger person? At what point do we begin to ask the question of individuals – 'what benefits do you bring to this society of ours and the world at large? - Do the benefits that emerge through your existence outweigh the negatives of your existence?'

That the question can be posed should not come as a shock to many societies around the world. Indeed those societies that still engage in state sanctioned murder in the form of Capital Punishment are already making value based judgements as to a person's 'worth' to society at large. I'm yet to reconcile myself with Capital Punishment (49). As a form of revenge killing I find it somewhat abhorrent, whilst simultaneously recognising that there is an inherent cost that continues to penalise the wider community by allowing certain incarcerated individuals from continuing to live. Again we see the paradox of choice that exists for us as a species – we fight for so many rights to extend our survival boundaries whilst simultaneously engaging in acts that push people towards Rule 4 of the 'Four Operational Rules for Life' – 'switch off Rule 1'.

To become wise as a species and not merely clever or knowledgeable as we seem to be currently, we have to ask ourselves the critical question. Yet because we are influenced by our socially negotiated requirements to establish our survival boundaries anyway we see fit, we also begin to see examples of almost arrogance and egotistical behaviours that seem to indicate that somehow, 'my' life is of greater value than anyone else's.

A pure example of this thinking in developed countries is the rise of the 'suburban truck' – the Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) in all its guises. Despite vast research indicating that SUV's are more likely to be involved in fatal accidents where the other car was not an SUV, sales of these mini trucks continue unabated. It isn't logic pushing the decision but Rule 2 (extend your survival boundaries) as owners justify their decision in knowing that in an accident 'at least it'll be the other guy who dies'. (50)

Over the past few years there has been a new focus on environmental issues, this time highlighted through the

‘global warming’ mantra. Vast research now shows that a small increase in Global Warming will lead to an increase in sea levels which are likely to result in millions of people being if not displaced from their homes, certainly killed.

So we’d have to wonder why, with the weight of evidence so compelling, so little real action is being undertaken by those with the greatest power to do so? The answer I suggest, lies in the way our Value Systems enact Rule 2 – extend your survival boundaries anyway you see fit. The facts as I see them are that certain societies are negotiating in different ways from others. Arguably what we are seeing is one group focused on the ‘benefits’ of a Global Warming scenario – a possibility of a stressed planet ridding itself of many, many millions of people, thus extending the survival boundaries for those better placed to live on. Compare that position to the one focused on the down-sides of Global Warming (51) trying to get people to make a few changes to their already established lifestyles so that others might survive now and into the future. Lifestyle versus Life.

### **Epilogue**

There are more than two sides of a Life and Death debate. The debate taking place is at a much larger scale than those being fought by ‘anti-abortion’ or ‘pro-euthanasia’ proponents whose focus by and large is on a very small number of individuals, as important as those issues are.

Do you really feel you have a right not to die? Is your contribution to this world so significant that the world would simply collapse without you? And what of other individuals you know of? With pressures on existing resources for feeding the world, staving off disease, planet and species degradation, how do we begin to reconcile what a ‘fair’ allocation of resources to an individual might be before the

‘overall value to society’ equation tips into negative territory? And what then might we do about it?

I’m not sure what the answers to those questions might be. I just know they are questions we need to begin considering, because if we find suitable answers we might have found a way to reconcile much of the problem between the ‘Right to Life’ proponents and the ‘Right to Die’ supporters. With all of our technology brilliance, our phenomena based social rules for behaviour, our age preventing beauty products and our human enhancement techniques, answering the ultimate question ‘do people have the right not to die?’ might well force us to confront the existence issues faced by billions of people whose entire time is spent on the precipice between Rule 1 and Rule 4 of the ‘Four Operating Rules For Life’. In the end the question that we might be forced to confront is – ‘Do people on the precipice also have the right to stay alive?’

In a paper I wrote as part of a Master’s program I applied a Futurist lens to the issue of Sustainability of life on the planet and suggested we needed some new governance rules in order to bring the issue of ‘life’ into much sharper focus for those ‘at the top’. (52)

The Future Generation Penalty Clause is a law that means that the children and grandchildren can be held liable for the actions of their parents and grandparents.

Imagine now, based on your past and current behaviours, values and choices of today, the type of legacy you will leave behind for your children and grand children who may then be held accountable for your actions. Now consider – ‘do people have the right NOT to die?’

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3. Dawkins R, 1998. **'Unweaving the Rainbow'** Mariner Books
4. Dawkins R, 2006. **'The God Delusion'** Houghton Mifflin
5. Graves, Clare W; Professor Emeritus Union College New York – see [www.clarewgraves.com](http://www.clarewgraves.com) for more information
6. Beck, Don Dr & Cowan C 1996. **'Spiral Dynamics – Mastering Values Leadership & Change'**; Blackwood Press
7. See also **'The Never Ending Quest'**, by Chris Cowan and Natasha Todorovic 2005, ECLET Publishing
8. The importance of 'Time' is very rarely considered in the Life and Death debate which is a great pity. Much can be learned from understanding the structural nature of Time and different ways in which a person's actions are influenced by their understanding of Time. For a discussion on Value Systems and approaches to Time refer to Barber MP 2004. *'An Hypothesis of*

9. Children's nursery rhymes are popular examples of explanations of the world. In fact the 'Ring a Ring a Rosy' nursery rhyme is purported by many to be an attempt to explain the working of the Black Plague. 'The pocket full of posies' refers to flowers carried to ward off the stench of the pustules that formed on the skin of the victims. The 'sneeze' signifies the final stages of life until the victims 'all fall down'. Mythbusters suggest the rhyme is not related - see <http://www.snopes.com/language/literary/rosie.asp>
10. Bulfinch, Thomas '**Bulfinch's Mythology**' circa 1855 and reprinted by (among others) Collier Books in 1965 and Laurel Leaf of New York in 1990 is a wonderful collection of the various Pantheons and their respective Gods that provides an excellent insight into much of the common names and language ascribed to natural phenomena and still in use today. One thing that this exceptional work does so well is show that our attempts to understand life and death issues date well prior to anything to do with the more recent technological developments.
11. Suskind, Patrick. 1985 '**Perfume**' Vintage Books
12. There are hundreds of known religions and an exponential number of customs that support them. A standard internet or library search on 'customs of burial' will provide numerous examples of the food stuffs, rare objects, precious stones and



metals and more that were often buried or left with the deceased so that they might have sufficient supplies for their journey, to offer for acceptance by the gods or to provide comfort into the 'next life'

13. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elixir\\_of\\_life](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elixir_of_life) for a definition of 'elixir of life'
14. Botox is the process of having a strain of the botulism virus injected into the skin in order to paralyse the nerves and muscles of the face. Botox is also beginning to gain some traction in assisting those with muscle spasms to limit the severity of those spasms – a case of the 'youthification' moving into the health arena, rather than the other way around as is more normal for the industry products. See <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-botox.htm>
15. Some examples of the Collagen /Peptide beauty products can be found at [http://www.beautykisses.co.uk/index.php?main\\_page=index&cPath=25](http://www.beautykisses.co.uk/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=25). The author has neither used nor endorses any of the products listed!
16. Peptides resources can be found at <http://www.peptidestation.com/> and [http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws\\_home/525495/description#description](http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/525495/description#description) and <http://www.peptides.net>
17. The following link will take you to a page listing an array of medicinal based applications deriving from plant extracts. Essential Oils are oils extracted from a plant and contain a pure element

of the plant's natural make-up.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicinal\\_properties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicinal_properties)

18. An image and discussion of the painting can be found at <http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=10326>
19. An image of the painting can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Lucas\\_Cranach\\_d.\\_%C3%84.007.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Lucas_Cranach_d._%C3%84.007.jpg)
20. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highlander\\_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highlander_(film))
21. Queen 1986; from the 'A Kind of Magic' album; EMI Records
22. The Big Chill - Columbia Pictures 1983
23. Fried Green Tomatoes - 1991 Universal Pictures.
24. Wells HG; 1896 'The Time Machine' – reprinted in 2000 by Bartleby of New York
25. Shelley, Mary; 1817 Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones. Frankenstein was originally published anonymously as '**The Modern Prometheus**' and not published under Shelley's own name until around 1830
26. Castenada, C. 1968 '**The Teaching of Don Juan**' Pocket Books
27. Gonzo, E., Skirke, U., Kleizen, H and Barber MP; 2007 '*Increasing the rate of Sustainable Change – a call for the redefinition of the concept and the model for its implementation*' Journal of Cleaner

Production, Elsevier Canada. Among many aspects this paper introduces the reader to a framework that differentiates between ‘knowledge’ and ‘wisdom’ and suggests that wisdom provides an understanding of what types of ‘solutions’ to problems are apt given specific contexts – an important layer often missing in the life and death debate as it is often pursued currently.

28. A definition of Cryonics can be found at <http://dying.about.com/od/glossary/g/cryonics.htm>
29. A definition of Abortion can be found at <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=2091>
30. A definition of Suicide can be found at <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=24337>
31. A definition of InVitro Fertilisation can be found at <http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=7222>
32. For an overview of the Heart-Lung transplant process see <http://www.torontotransplant.org/patients/default.cfm>
33. Drug Therapies are used on all sorts of illnesses and diseases with most people aware of products created to assist in HIV, Tuberculosis, Influenza, Hormone treatment, Cancers, Staph infections and more. A simple internet search on ‘Drug

Therapies in Health' will reveal many thousands of sites offering information

34. Stem cells are the basic 'building blocks' upon which all cells of any type are built. Research in the area suggests that the application of stem cells to damaged parts of the body will see new and healthy cells replace the damaged ones. See <http://stemcells.nih.gov/info/basics/> The initial argument against stem cell research hinged over the means by which cultivation took place (from within embryonic cellular structures). <http://www.biotechnologyonline.gov.au/human/et-hicssc.cfm> More recent developments now see stem cells being 'harvested' from a much wider array of sites in the body, minimizing some of the perceived ethical implications though the 'playing God' debate still exists. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1017/p02s01-ussc.html> and <http://media.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8164>
35. The idea of using Robotics to help us extend our survival boundaries is not a new one with the word 'Robot' (Czech for 'menial labor') coming into use through Karel Capek's description of workers in his 1920 work 'RUR'. Recently more thinking in the arena on how robotics might save lives can be seen in [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/01/0115\\_030115\\_snakebot.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/01/0115_030115_snakebot.html)
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and thinking and it does provide a great insight into the emergence of a technology now seen in GM food crops though the jury still appears to be out on GM food.

37. Attwood, Margaret. 2003; **'Oryk & Crake'** Double Day/Random House
38. Ettinger, Robert CW; 1962 'The Prospect of Immortality' Double Day. See also 'Man into Superman' 1972. Ettinger's works are widely believed to not only have kicked started a wider scale scientific research into the area of cryonics, it has also been a major influence on the emergence of 'Trans-humanism' also covered briefly in this paper
39. Among others (including more recent examples) see Wilke, JC. Dr. 1985 **'Abortion Questions and Answers'** published by Hayes Publishing Co.
40. Among other natural causes, aborted pregnancy has been strongly linked to breast feeding – see *'On the relations between menstruation, conception and lactation and the influence of lactation in causing abortion'* by Dr Robert Barnes
41. See <http://www.cryonics.org/> as one area for further information. Please note that this site might be seen by some as a pro support group with vested financial interests
42. A definition for Euthanasia can be found at <http://dying.about.com/od/palliativeendoflifecare/p/euthanasia.htm>

43. One report that looks at the increase in voluntary Caesarean and the negative impacts on both mother and baby is cited in this article <http://forums.obgyn.net/ob-gyn-1/OBGYNL.0609/0126.html>
44. In the case of IVF we are seeing many more examples of the technique being utilized by women traditionally seen as beyond normal 'child bearing' years. I make no judgment as to whether the traditional age grouping is more or less valid than the emerging age groups of older women. One such example can be found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/378057.stm> and <http://www.wyff4.com/family/3906084/detail.html>
45. See the site listed at Ref 32
46. Kurzweil. R and Grossman T; 2004 '**Fantastic Voyage- Live Long Enough to Live**' Holtzbrinck Publishers and see <http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/index/> for an overview of trans-humanism.
47. *ZPG*; 1971 Paramount Pictures. The film picked up on the then popular themes of over- population of the planet and perhaps articulated much of what was captured by the '**Limits to Growth**' book of 1972 by Meadows, Meadows, Randers and Behrens III.
48. *Logan's Run* – 1976 MGM. The book and film appears to borrow much from HG Wells' *The Time Machine* where a utopia exists until the ripe old age of 30 when extermination takes place -

the residents of this utopian world were the new 'Eloi' and the faceless exterminators had replaced the underground cannibalistic Morlock species.

49. A reasonable overview of Capital Punishment can be found at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/c/capitalp.htm>
50. Among others a transcript of a discussion on the rising incidents of SUV related road deaths can be found at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science/ockham/stories/s1604721.htm>
51. There's plenty of information available on Global Warming around. I can recommend the Al Gore PowerPoint 2006 movie 'An Inconvenient Truth' and for a counter position consider <http://www.environmentaldefense.org/page.cfm?tagID=1011> among others
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