

Live to be 100+? Extreme longevity research is futuristic privatized enterprise

In the past year, three new extreme longevity companies, funded by big names have publicized themselves and their mission: slow the aging process and extending human life.

Google's enigmatic [California Life Company, called Calico](#), and Craig Venter's [Human Longevity, Inc.](#), joined Russian billionaire Dmitry Itskov's [2045 Initiative](#), now 3 years old.

It's impossible to know how much funding backs these companies. But, it's definitely private. And this could be a big problem. [Richard Koo, bioethicist at Ichan School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai](#) noted the inherent inequality that will develop from this funding system:

“Private parties do not have to act for the greater good, each project presumably having to be held accountable to obtain a return on investment for the investors first. Furthermore, depending on the structure of the organization and how it is capitalized, a project does not even have to share any details of what it is doing (see Calico). There also exists the concern that in the hands of private parties, benefits to be gained from the technological advances from the project will be reserved for the wealthy few. Finally but not exhaustively, undertaking to address the socio-economic fall-out that comes with longer human life on average...e.g., how to provide for the social security, feeding, housing, health care and employment in societies where people live significantly longer on average...is undoubtedly not within the scope of any such project.”

Venter and Google (as far as anyone can tell) are exploring the medical and genetic side of aging. That seems more in line with the idea of accelerating known technologies.

The case of Itskov and his 2045 initiative, however, is of a different ilk. Itskov's vision is definitely something out of science fiction. First, the program will design human like robots, called avatars, that can carry around brains after people die.

The avatars will be systematically upgraded to function and send back sensory information remotely. And finally, the brain will be reversed engineered to create artificial human intelligence to which our identities can be eternally uploaded. It's a pretty ambitious roll out plan. For an animation rich, scientific content poor look, have a glance at the YouTube commercial for the project.

The initiative garnered a lot of publicity, as you might imagine brain hosting robots would. But, as Pete Shanks at Biopolitical times writes, Itskov appears to be behind schedule. The third congress of the initiative was never announced and no one's heard from Itskov since the initial press explosion, he reports.

Which brings up another problem with privately funded research. Shanks considers when the money runs out or the billionaires change their minds, or both what happens next?

“There are serious questions about relying upon the capricious whims of rich individuals to perform actual research. If Itskov has indeed dropped out of sight, that should remind us just how short an attention span can be. But ... why did so many take him so seriously?”

Additional Resources:

- [Transhumanism in the crosshairs: The dark side of radical longevity](#), Genetic Literacy Project
- [Genetically engineering humans for enlightenment?](#), Genetic Literacy Project