

Garrett, M.D. (2017). *Immortality with a lifetime guarantee: Aging as a human survival strategy*. United States of America: Createspace., 238 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1545288320

Reviewed by Chin Nam Chia¹

The captivating title of the book '*Immortality with a lifetime guarantee*' immediately arouses the curiosity of avid readers, especially of non-fiction books, to browse through its pages. Eight well-researched chapters, organised to progressively build on the argument of each preceding chapter, beckon the readers to join the author on a journey to explore the immortality of humankind. The book climaxes in the final chapter where the readers are surprisingly confronted with the author's position *against* the idea of immortality but in favor of ageing as a human strategy for survival as a species. Consequently, the author suggests that death is not only the ultimate point, but also necessary for the human life course. Given that there are already countless books and sci-fi movies which suggest that science is bringing humanity closer to immortality, one wonders how many readers would agree with the author's proposition. The answer hinges immensely on how well Mario Garrett argues his case.

The synopses of the chapters may entice you to find out the answer for yourself. The first chapter, 'Immortality all around us', establishes the facts that immortality is a reality; whether we look at the genes in the human body, the bacteria thriving around us or even the creatures in the sea. Contrary to popular belief, science has yet to discover the solution to enable the human species to live forever. The second chapter, 'Why are we mortal', explores the reasons behind the need for us to grow old and die. It is apparent from scientific literature that aging is an integral part of our existence. Otherwise, the human race will become extinct. Being mortal enables humans, who are endowed with longevity through the presence of a bigger brain, to survive and thrive as a species by passing on the knowledge of our shared history and environment from generation to generation. The third chapter, 'Search for the switch', builds on the preceding chapter by debunking the fountain of youth narrative. The theories of biology of aging and genetics should inform us of our survival strategies in an ever-changing environment rather than mislead us into thinking there is a 'cure' for ageing. The fourth chapter, 'Survival package: balance', states that our life expectancy depends on how well we respond to the environment. In other words, the true story of the biology of immortality is in finding stability in this symbiotic relationship. The fifth chapter, 'Lessons from centenarians', tests out this argument by scrutinizing the lives of people who are one hundred years old and more. This exercise not only confirms the need to be in tune with our immediate environment but also surfaces many factors that facilitate or impede living longer.

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Nevertheless, more has to be done to investigate the intricacy of achieving longevity. The sixth chapter, 'Death fear' rationalizes the fear of death as an outcome of being endowed with a bigger brain and increased longevity. Scientific advancement may extend the human lifespan, but it does not lead to immortality. Immortality is a psychological crutch to help us deal with the fear of death. In fact, death plays a vital role in the development of the human species. The seventh chapter, 'Delusional life' cautions that the belief in immortality is a delusional trick to get us into thinking we can actually defeat death. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, 'Future of immortality', concludes that immortality is purely a psychological construct. It is a concept that goes against our strategy for survival as a species.

For general readers, this book might not be an easy read because of the many technical terms and jargon used by the author pertaining to the field of ecological biology, genetics, biology, neurology and anthropology. However, he makes the reading a lot easier by providing a conclusion for every chapter to bring home his main point. In this way, he ensures readers do not miss the crucial messages which are meant to substantiate his case. For the students of gerontology, this book is definitely a good read as the author provides a broad coverage of the issues associated with aging and supports his argument of aging as a positive development process based on scientific and empirical evidences from researchers and experts from the field.

There are two areas which may adversely affect the experience and knowledge imparted to readers who intend to use this book as a resource for gerontology. Firstly, it lacks a proper referencing of sources. Perhaps the author assumes readers are familiar with the authors, researches and books cited. This may not be the case given the broad coverage of the various topics across ecological biology, genetics, biology, neurology and anthropology. It would be expedient to have an additional section such as, "Notes on Sources", to facilitate the read, particularly for those who interested in gerontology. Secondly, the author's position with regards to religion may come across as controversial. It is presumptuous of him to state, "religion is dependent on the construct of immortality." Theologians and scholars of the major world religions will definitely refute his statement and even find it offensive. Moreover, in the third paragraph of Chapter One, he wrote that "we will revisit religion throughout the story of immortality" (2), which implies he would further address the issues of religion and immortality in the following chapters. Disappointingly, there was no more mention of religion after that singular statement.

To sum up, the author uses a wide coverage of many topics to disprove immortality as a lifetime guarantee and establish ageing as a fact of life.