**Excerpts from T. Daly, *Chasing Methuselah*:**

**Introduction (p. 11)**

Though conflicts will likely remain regarding the overall goal of lon­gevity medicine, it is difficult to maintain the distinction between slowing aging for the compression of morbidity and slowing aging for an extended life. Common to both narratives however is the assumption that suffering in the form of aging is inimical to human flourishing, a doctrine that drives much of biomedicine. If indeed aging is construed primarily as suffering, then, as Eric Juengst has astutely observed, “delaying age-associated ill­nesses as long as possible before death is the obvious goal, whether within or beyond the historical life span.”34 A second commonality between these approaches to aging attenuation is their instrumental stance taken toward it. While in some way death may still be medicine’s ultimate enemy, aging is now the more immediate enemy.35 Though historically aging has not been considered a disease, it is increasingly considered as a disorder amenable to clinical therapy. Despite these internal conflicts, the idea of a significantly prolonged healthy life has captured the public’s imagination, as demonstrat­ed by an increased willingness to invest considerable resources in attempts to merely perpetrate the appearance of youth. Indeed, over one hundred million Americans already use some form of anti-aging regimen to mask its effects, in the form of pills, periodic fasting, or plastic surgery.

34. Juengst et al., “Biogerontology, ‘Anti-aging Medicine,’” 26.

35. Olshansky, “Session 2.” Olshansky asserts that “aging should be the enemy, not death. Going after the aging process itself, I think is fundamental.”

**Chapter 1 (p. 69)**

The growing body of anti-aging research continues to fuel the hopes for longer, healthier lives. Even the moderate prospect of seven to ten years of healthy life and the possibility of avoiding a lengthy decline is enormously attractive. Certainly, if life is good and death the greatest threat to that good, it is difficult to criticize the desire to add a few years of health by attenuating aging and possibly reducing the period of morbidity before death, given especially the enormous financial, physical, and emotional strain of provid­ing care in later life. But it is worth considering some of the subtle costs of slowing aging through technology, namely, how our attempts to modulate aging blur the distinction between aging and disease, and the impact this may have on our understanding of what it means to be embodied creatures. For it appears that with each discovery of a new pathway to longevity the distinction between aging and disease becomes more difficult to make. Re­searchers Leonard Guarente and Cynthia Kenyon are keenly aware of the power at their disposal, noting that “animals that should be old stay young” when even a single gene is altered. When confronted with such findings, they concede that “we begin to think of ageing as a disease that can be cured, or at least postponed.”256 There is enough evidence to suggest that the more aging is likened to a disease, the more we are inclined to view the body as an adversary, as something in our possession that must be brought into submission of the naked will through the growing arsenal of technologies currently at our disposal.

256. Guarente and Kenyon, “Genetic Pathways,” 261.

[Longer excerpt (650 words) possible, pp. 69-71]

**Chapter 2 (p. 75)**

The principles of evolutionary biology have proven very effective in uncovering the processes of human aging and how it might be slowed. But when science itself considers aging as an enemy, it must appeal to myth. It is perfectly legitimate to uncover the operations of nature; Christians have long endorsed this practice as a way of learning more about creation and God. But determining what should be manipulat­ed or repaired requires something more than sound scientific methodology can rightfully supply. When scientists for example justify slowing human aging by appealing to Darwinian evolution or some notion of progress or the good life, they invariably import metaphysical assumptions in supplying the necessary myth—though often unarticulated—without realizing it. That we require some metanarrative or myth to make sense of reality is not the problem. The problem, as Allen Verhey once observed, is that bad myths exist.283 This does not necessarily mean that the conclusion reached by ag­ing researchers is wrong, nor should it be too readily concluded that the Christian myth—the metanarrative of reality as disclosed in the revelation of Jesus Christ as attested in Scripture—precludes any interventions aimed at slowing aging. As this brief survey has shown, and the next two chapters will make clear, the quest for longer life by slowing aging has indeed been promoted along theological lines, often in reference to the creation narra­tives in Genesis.

283. Verhey, *Nature and Altering It*, 15.

**Chapter 2 (p. 76)**

The quest for longer life is as old as humanity itself. Though the history of life extension reads as a catalogue of spectacular failures, recent discoveries of the mechanisms and processes associated with aging, backed by laboratory results, have engendered new hope that human aging might be brought un­der human control. As the search for the means to retain a youthful body has moved from alchemy to hygiene to modern science, it becomes increasingly difficult to draw a conceptual distinction between aging and disease. The story of aging attenuation as narrated by evolutionary biology and genetics suggests that the human body is nearly infinitely malleable or even dispos­able. With the development of modern medicine and science, the body has tended to be viewed as morally neutral at best, and at worst as a biological adversary that threatens not only to cut existence short, but to inflict increas­ing levels of suffering and limitation along the way. While this dominant myth rightly encourages research and interventions in the body to relieve suffering and improve the quality of life, such amorphous concepts are easily incorporated into a voluntarist calculus, where the concepts of suffering and quality of life are understood primarily in reference to the individual will. Each new breakthrough in aging attenuation encourages an increasingly ex­pansive notion of what constitutes suffering, tempting us to treat our bodies as more of an adversary than ally. Indeed, even this way of putting it might suggest that the human body is little more than something we possess rather than constituting who we are. The story of aging and the human body as nar­rated by modern science encourages us to think about embodiment in ways that must be examined from a Christian perspective.

**Chapter 3 (pp. 151-52)**

It is helpful to remember that before the advent of Baconian science nature was perceived largely as an unchangeable given that required hu­manity to learn to live within the dictates of this reality, conforming to the conditions it imposed.189 With the advent of modern science, however, we are now confronted with the temptation of shaping reality in accordance with our most deeply held desires and wishes. If, as C. S. Lewis observed in The Abolition of Man, the old problem concerned conforming one’s soul to reality through the pursuit of knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue, then any attempts to remake nature—including our bodies—in accordance with our desires will inevitably shape our character as well. But the growth in knowledge afforded by our technological projects has a way of displacing some of these older practices by which virtue might be cultivated. In a pre­scient remark, the English philosopher C. E. M. Joad (1891–1953) observed that our increased knowledge has engendered a new attitude toward human life where we have effectively substituted a problem of morals for one of technique: “For a problem of morals, a problem of discipline and control—how to govern the human soul—there has been substituted a problem of technique—how to alter reality in ways which are agreeable to man.”190 We must not however be deceived into thinking that we are left with a binary choice—either submit to the limits of nature for the benefit of the soul, or reshape nature according to our desires and thereby put the soul at risk. As Bacon recognized, God’s command to fill and subdue creation (Gen 1:28–30) implies that some interventions in nature are appropriate. Herein lies the crux of the matter. The real challenge in formulating a Christian account of nature and human interaction with or even against nature (in­cluding ourselves) requires discerning precisely what kinds of interventions are warranted and the particular means by which such interventions are car­ried out. Guidance in these matters must rely on a faithful interpretation of Scripture, especially the creation accounts in Genesis and the life and work of Jesus Christ as attested in the Gospels.

189. The survey in chapter 1 also showed that the desire to transcend human fini­tude is as old as humanity itself.

190. Joad, *Recovery of Belief*, 53–54.

**Chapter 4 (pp. 199-200)**

The asceticism espoused by Athanasius and Antony is situated within a theo­logical framework that, while sharing surface commonalities with Platonic, Gnostic, and Stoic thought, is nevertheless distinguishable from these by an unqualified affirmation of embodiment, refusing even the idea that the body is merely an instrumental good insofar as it facilitates the reformation of one’s soul. Though any ascetic regime is susceptible to abuse, Antony and Athanasius affirmed the inherent goodness of both the body and the soul as God’s good creation ex nihilo. Their asceticism was not aimed at eliminating desires, but at redirecting one’s desires under control of the Spirit, thereby restoring the soul as the rightful ruler of the body. Among the Desert Fathers, fasting was recognized as a crucial first step in the reordering of one’s body and soul. Only after one had effectively quieted the impulses of one’s body could one most effectively deal with the more stubborn desires of the will. As a result, the body would doubly reap the benefits of fasting and by being under the benevolent governance of a well-ordered soul.

**Chapter 5 (pp. 210-211)**

Though there seems to be no definitive Christian response to the use of aging-attenuating technology, Barth’s christologically determined anthro­pology acknowledges both a proper desire for continued existence while also insisting on the goodness of our allotted span. As we have just seen, how­ever, this theological anthropology is not determinative one way or the other when it comes to attenuating aging. But there are still other perspectives to consider, perspectives that acknowledge the nature of embodiment that are no less christologically determined, perspectives that take the relationship between our souls and bodies into account. Indeed, if to be the soul of our body is another way of speaking of human finitude, of being in time, then Barth’s account of the body-soul relationship as revealed in the real man Je­sus may have something to say concerning both asceticism and longevity.37 Instead of asking whether engaging in technologies to lengthen our span ob­scures the sign of our nature as bounded by God or illuminates the covenant relationship which prohibits simple resignation to our allotted span—itself a helpful, though difficult question—we may ask what, if anything, is at stake with respect to the body-soul relationship as revealed in the real man Jesus. This entails building on the anthropological insights of Athanasius and the Desert Fathers. As with his discussion on human finitude, Barth’s insights on the real man Jesus, whose life is determinative for relating a Spirit-sustained soul and body in their proper order will help frame the discussion, though we may be left with still more questions that defy definitive answers.

37. Barth, *CD* 3/2:521.