

# Vox Dei

"Life has no meaning the moment you lose the illusion of being eternal."

## Chapter I.

Waking up after a heart stroke is very much like waking up after being black out drunk: you have no idea where you are, you feel broken and dizzy. It's not particularly a feeling that I would recommend, but I guess it's not that irregular to get one at the age of 90. Thank God or Vishnu or Zeus or whatever for the Markovnikov shunting methods and developments in the medical technologies of the last decades for keeping me alive. 2091 seems like a weird year to be old, because even people who are 60 aren't considered old anymore. Yet, my generation was born a bit too early.

Speaking of 60, that's my son's age. He was born in 2031. I was born in 2001. Now it's 2091. He just walked into my ward, looking very disturbed. I am not surprised to see him so distressed — to be fair — his father could have died. For him and the entirety of the Generation Beta, Gamma, Delta and so on, death is no longer an inevitable part of existence. I was born at the time when people were only starting to flirt with transhumanism, but in the last 50 years a lot has changed. And those changes have led to my entrant son, Leo, spurting out a very gentle: "Dad, I've already called the EC, they're willing to arrange a meeting as soon as you're out of the hospital. I hope you realise that this is important and must be done as soon as possible, regardless of your cynicism."

Oh, what a nice son I have raised. He knows me so well. None of the pointless crying, just a very pragmatic expression of concern. Like father, like son.

"I am glad to see you too, my dear."

"Dad, let's skip foreplay and get to business. I am not being rude, you know that. I am just trying to get some sense into you, because your heart is now a ticking bomb. Markovnikov's nanorobots are doing a good job at building detours around the clogs for now, but your heart is a bloody ticking bomb!"

“I understand that very well and I appreciate your care, but now I would like to rest. I am willing to see them next week Monday, if I am out by that time.”

“Okay, dad. It’s good to hear that you aren’t expressing your usual stubbornness about this. You’ve been a hipster your whole life, but marginalising yourself by sacrificing your life really isn’t cool. I need you here, Bea needs you, Max needs you.”

“But I won’t really be here, will I?”

“Dad, I asked you to quit the bullshit, didn’t I? You get what I mean.”

I nodded, but I knew that quitting bullshit wasn’t my strongest point, even after 90 years on Earth. The nod was satisfactory for Leo and he glanced at his pod, elegantly making an excuse to step back onto the swift-flowing conveyor belt of existence.

## **Chapter II.**

Considering the contemporary sempiternal conceptualisation of the vector of time, I have to clarify some things for the readers from the past. In short, my son wants to put my consciousness into a place, where rivers of milk and honey flow steadily and everything is in abundance. But, most importantly, at that place I am physically fit, available for contact from the outside and virtually immortal.

This organisation, the Eternal Corporation, occupies itself with the task of creating and maintaining the perfect digital world for you as well as uploading your consciousness into that world intact. The Planetary Government is now working on including this in the basic insurance rate. Who can wish for more than that?.. Not many, but some of us would. And I consider myself one of those, who wish for more than that.

My name is Eliot, I am a dying theologian. You might have heard about my essays or activism, but only if you are reading this after 2043. That’s when my essay “On the theological complications of the Safe New World” was published. That essay was the beginning of my career as a Vox Deier - the voice of God - or, more generally, a representative of religion - in the contemporary posthumanist world. However, this story is not about my recognition or my past essays, because that doesn’t matter anymore. This story is about me and about why I decided to die in spite of the possibility not to.

## **Chapter III.**

“Welcome to Eternity”, written in a beautiful and dynamic lettering, is the first thing you see upon entering the local headquarters of the Eternal Corporation. Whether you live in the past or the future, the interior of this place would be familiar to you. It’s probably just how you imagine it to be based on the abundant scenes from science fiction movies. Yes, it’s one of those semi-sterile places.

The most sterile aspect of the foyer is the artificially generated feeling of being alone. Augmented reality panes create a notion of serenity and uniqueness. Before these display panes were able to achieve a satisfactory level of believability, architects had to pluck and twist spaces so people would feel small, big, meek or intimidated. Nowadays a hundred people can be taking the same route in the same spaces, just meters from each other, but catch no glimpse or sound of one another, seamlessly protected by a layer of high-tech monitors. So here I am, slumbering along a spuriously claustrophobic space towards an office, where I will be received by a real person to talk about my artificial life after my real death. How do you think these panes make me feel?

“Good morning, esteemed Eliot,” croons the skilled genderless empath, reaching a hand out towards me. I shake it back and the empath continues purring: “My name is Zea, she/her, and I will be helping you today. I am a fan of your work, Eliot, so I am extremely excited to welcome you in the offices of the Eternal Corporation and guide you in making this important decision about the future of your life.” Zea did read my work, she certainly is not lying. Nobody uses the word extreme in 2091. It has become old-fashioned bureaucratic balderdash, but my works are full of that word, because they so often criticise the extremities of contemporary society.

However, what Zea told me is not important, because Zea was well-trained and young. Because all the visitors were received by such a Zea and told exactly what they wanted to hear so that they would agree to the conditions of the EC. To be honest, even in 2091 no one reads terms and conditions and everybody just wants to easily float into eternal youth, without being bothered by paperwork. What kind of a document would make you reject the dream of an eternal life?

Importantly, Zea was born to be an aeon. Zea will never even have to think about being uploaded into the realms of EC, because her physical body does not deteriorate. Looking at young people, their vibrant and full-blooded bodies, has always stirred up jealousy in me, but knowing that people born after 2067 will never get old just makes me sad. I have run out of true youthfulness in this life and digital youth is simply a bitter ersatz. So is it really that much of a miracle that I want to just peacefully die?

I did not say all of that out loud, but the reaction that I ended up receiving after some twenty minutes of a back-and-forth polite discussion about the deterioration of contemporary ethical values, was a worthy response: “Very well, Eliot. In case you stand

by your opinion so strongly, I will immediately notify your son about your decision and put you off the queue.” That sneaky bastard! Oh well, blackmail is always the ultimate trick up one’s sleeve. I was anticipating a difficult conversation with my son either way, so I just responded with an equally polite: “Well, thank you very much for your assistance and a devoted appreciation of my work, Zea! Farewell!”

She smiles, but I see that she is annoyed. This little misfortune of a deal will show up in her records and, even if you’re reading in the past, you can imagine the grim consequences of a single bad performance in a world, where all humans are eternal. As I leave the building, the display panes make their last attempt at invoking remorse in me: as I am walking towards the entrance I become a witness of a digital romantic scene: two young people running hand in hand towards a bridge in the middle of a meadow and laughing. Two love-birds stopping at the bridge and embracing each other in a kiss. I am not surprised about seeing my own face on the boy’s head, but the presence of my wife’s face on the girl makes me quiver and hastily look away.

#### **Chapter IV.**

“Dad, that sounds terrible! They really didn’t have to bring up mom. I mean I have my accounts to square with you after this imprudent decision of yours, but that was really despicable!”

“Thank you for your ambivalent sympathy. To be honest, I think this corporation has some personal issues with me because of the ideologies I’ve been promoting through Vox Dei. It simply affects their income and makes the media raise a brow one extra time. Maybe they were hoping to witness me give into their claws after all this time and were disappointed by my steadfastness.”

“Ah, poor mom. She would have definitely figured out how to convince you to stay, dad.”

“Ha ha, yes she knew her ways...”

The thing is, dear reader, my wife died twenty-eight years ago to my deepest regret. Back then, such aggressive forms of cancer, as brain cancer, could not be cured, so she passed. It is an understatement to say it was a big hit both for me and my son. Especially considering the possibility that EC is providing me with now, just a couple of decades later. But life is not all honey and I have made peace with that fact. However, that places me in an awkward position of being the bearer of the responsibility of making my sixty-year-old son an orphan, by deciding in favour of death.

“But, dad, how will I do without your guidance? What do I tell Max? He hasn’t heard a thing about death so far.”

“Well, Leo, look at this ladybug here: do you think it knows what death is? It doesn’t and lives a happy life, eating other bugs and making human beings happy with its beautiful spots. However, all the beasts around it keep dying and, ultimately, so does it. Does that make a ladybug less content with life? No. That’s the difference between human beings and animals - the necessity of making a choice about whether ignorance is bliss or if it’s not.”

“Dad, neither of us have a choice to just forget about death, though!”

“Yes, that is true, but we can all come to peace with death and enjoy how special the perishing property of the human body is. It is just a part of our existence. Moreover, as you very well know, I am a buddhist, so I am very much excited about what other experience I may come across in my next reincarnation. Maybe I will become that very ladybug and experience the blissful joy of pure ignorance that we just talked about. Wouldn’t that be worth it?”

“I’ve always hated this holistic egoism about you and now it has officially reached its pinnacle. You do realise that your ladybug reincarnation will help neither me, nor your grandson in life? Nor will your great Vox Dei brain be able to lead its generation of ontological dissidents. You do realise that, don’t you?”

“Well, son, I do realise that, but I am justly proving a point here. No Markovnikov treatments or EC emulated realms can substitute the wheel of life, the Samsara. And an ideology with the same leader is stagnant. And you and Max will never grow up if I am always available for consultation. My death is by far the most natural process to occur after birth, Leo. I love you, but this is just the way life goes.”

Leo was crying next to me. But I knew that he understood, he just was in denial. It was a beautiful sunny day and we were walking in a blooming park in the summer. At once, he stopped crying and just looked around. After a while, he looked up to me with red eyes and traces of salt on his cheeks, smiled and hugged me. He pressed into me, desperately trying to catch the last drops of my soul energy, the energy that I have been providing him with for so many years. I think that was the moment he grew up and became appreciative of the ceaseless vector of time. Better late than never.

## **Chapter V.**

I have already made up my mind: I want to die. So what? Why is that important to you? Maybe you think that I am trying to be the second Christ and create a stir by committing such a controversial act. But it's really not that deep, I am only writing this to make the past appreciate death and the future be nostalgic about it.

You see, I am not willing to engage in an eternal life, because I have already sinned so much, that the expectation of experiencing the century-long metamorphosis from a meteorite into a grain of sand, is too exciting for me. Karmically speaking, entering eternal life before achieving nirvana, is cheating. The same goes for any religion. In a nutshell, that is why I am choosing to die and, coincidentally, that is the reason I gained interplanetary recognition as the oppositoner of the modern ontologies of human life. I wish I wasn't a buddhist to begin with. Had I been a supporter of a more radical philosophy, I would have probably kicked up a fuss in this galaxy. But now it's too late.

Realistically speaking, I would recommend death to each and every one of you. If you seek experiences, then die, because the chances of the generated experiences of the Eternal Corp. being genuinely exciting, are slim and the chances of you getting the experience of dying in an emulation, are even slimmer. Herewith, to my readers from the past, I wish a very joyful reading of my yet-to-come essays and to the ones from the future I wish a very safe rebellion against the predominant hollow-heartedness. And I will surely see you in some other life.