

Episode: *Author Interview: “How Might Health Care Think About the Ethics of Human Extinction?”*

Guest: Devin M. Kellis, MS

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Devin M. Kellis, a medical student at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine, Columbia, where he received an MS in biomedical science. He's here to discuss his article, coauthored with Dr Émile P. Torres, “How Might Health Care Think About the Ethics of Human Extinction?,” in the August 2025 issue of the Journal, [Existential Health Care Ethics](#). Devin, thank you for being back on the podcast.

DEVIN KELLIS: Thanks again for having me. [music fades]

[00:00:47] HOFF: So, what's the main ethics point of your article?

KELLIS: So the main point that we make in this article is that it's important that we develop a framework for thinking ethically about the problem of human extinction. And so, Dr Torres recently discussed three views on the ethics of human extinction in one of his recent books, and we review those three views in this article. The first is called the equivalence view, and it states that human extinction is only as bad as the events that bring it about. The second view we bring up is called the further loss view, and it essentially states that extinction is bad not just because of the events that bring it about, but because of various further losses that happen, such as the inability to experience future happiness and things of that nature. And the final view is what's called the pro-extinctionist view that, surprisingly, some people do hold. And that's essentially that some people hold that it would actually be better if humanity would go extinct than if it continued to exist.

[00:01:48] HOFF: And so, what should health professions students and trainees specifically be taking from this article?

KELLIS: Yeah, I think the main thing that students and trainees should take away from this article is that these three different views on the ethics of human extinction are quite important from a health care perspective. The equivalence view, for example, implies that the way that health care's goals are situated right now are pretty much on point and don't really need to change because the equivalence view prioritizes people that are alive here and now and the events that they would experience during those lives. But in

the case of the further loss view, health care would need to be much more concerned about future people and future generations. And on some views and some empirical claims suggest that there could be a lot of future people, and if that's the case, we have to figure out a way to manage the health of existing people in the context of there potentially being a large number of future people.

[00:02:44] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

KELLIS: Yeah. In the article, we really only explored the equivalence and further loss views and didn't explore the pro-extinctionist view very much. However, the pro-extinctionist view is quite influential among many philosophical pessimists, and the person that comes to mind with respect to this is Arthur Schopenhauer, the German pessimist. And there's also individuals who are radical environmentalists who believe that humanity should go extinct because it would be better for the environment so that nature could recover. And then finally, there are some more idiosyncratic philosophies among individuals who are technologists or in Silicon Valley that sometimes indicate that it would be better for humanity to be replaced by intelligent machines, or artificial superintelligence, instead of continuing to exist. And all of these ideas are kind of spinning around in the cultural consciousness but haven't really necessarily been explored in great detail. [theme music returns] And the implications of them for health care haven't really been considered to a great degree.

[00:04:10] HOFF: Devin, thank you so much for your time on the podcast and for your contributions to the Journal this month.

KELLIS: I appreciate it.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.