

When is a Life Complete?

Dr Michael Irwin
and
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My Death, My Decision

Formerly SOARS:
Society for Old Age Rational Suicide

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MDMD: My Death, My Decision

Formerly SOARS: Society for Old Age Rational Suicide

Formed 2009 by Michael Irwin

GP

Former Medical Director of the United Nations

Former Chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society

A right to die campaigner for 25 years



Mentally competent, elderly people, suffering unbearably from various health problems, should be able to get help from a medical professional to die.

REGARDLESS of whether they are “terminally ill”

Michael Irwin stood down as Coordinator of SOARS last August. Now a patron.
Phil Cheatle is the current Coordinator of MDMD

Neither Michael nor Phil have any conflicts of interest to disclose for Euthanasia 2016

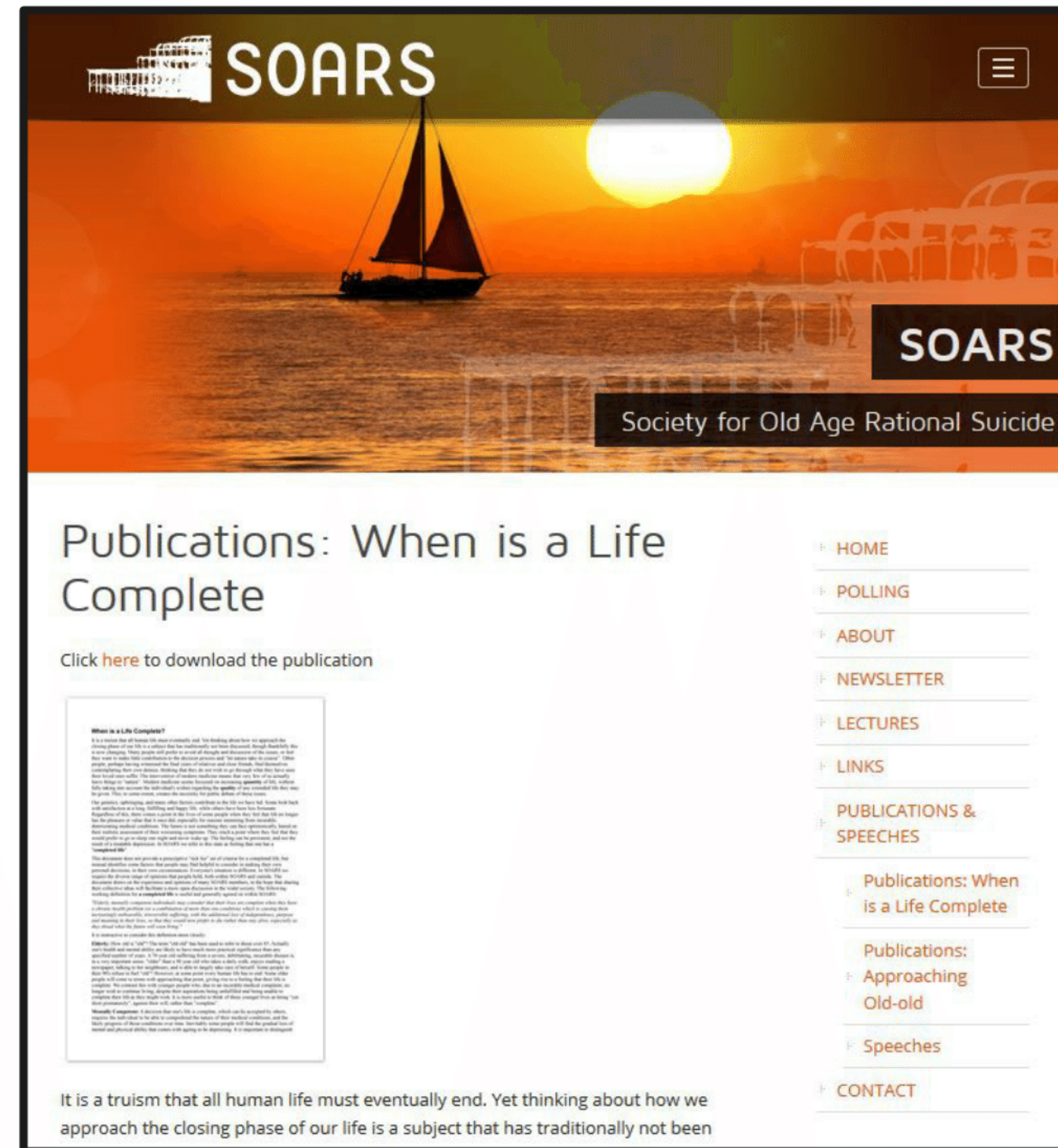
When is a Life Complete?

SOARS project during 2015

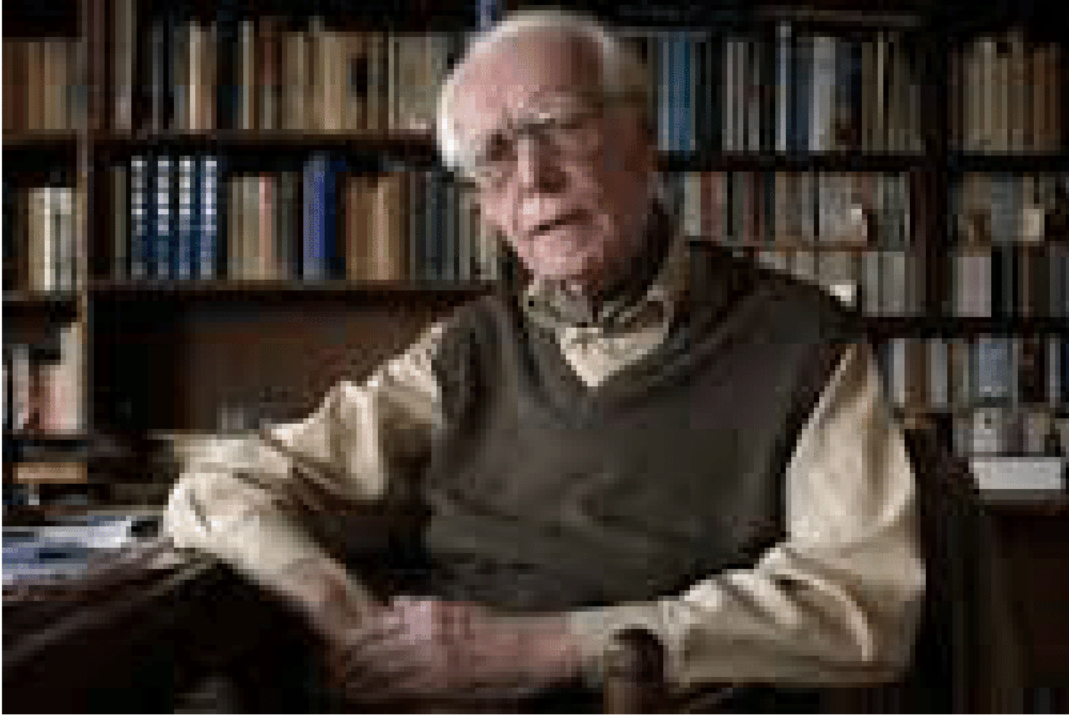
“When is a Life Complete?” document

Valuable feedback from SOARS supporters

Available on website



Origins of the “Completed Life” concept



Huib Drion

Former Dutch Supreme Court judge and Professor of civil law (1917-2004)

“It appears to me... that many old people would find great reassurance if they could have a means to end their lives in an acceptable way at the moment that to them... appears suitable.”

NRC Handelsblad 1991

- People aged 75 or over
- Living alone,
- Option of medically assisted suicide
- **Before** the final stages of decline and dependence.

(Obituary in BMJ 13 May 2004)

'The Self Chosen Death of the Elderly' Aug 2011

Wouter Beekman (Of Free Will)

http://www.worldrtd.net/sites/default/files/newsfiles/UVW%20engels%20definitief%201.1_0.pdf

James Leonard Park

“Completed Life or Premature Death?” <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~parkx032/CY-CLPD.html>

Jain tradition of Santhara / Sallekhana



Tradition of **voluntary peaceful death** dating back to 250BC

'Over 200 Jains embrace death every year'

India Express 30th Sept 2006

Requires permission of a religious leader

Possible reasons include:

- **Old age with failing health**
- **Terminal illness in which death is imminent**

'10,000 Jains shave heads to protest high court ban on Santhara'

Times of India 23rd August 2015

A Completed Life: The MDMD view

Some people rationally feel their life is complete:

- Elderly

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- Mentally competent

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- Have chronic health problem(s)

What is good health?

WHO definition (1948):

'a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.'

A Completed Life: The MDMD view

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- Incurable

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Quality of Life is permanently below the level they wish to accept

Quality of Life

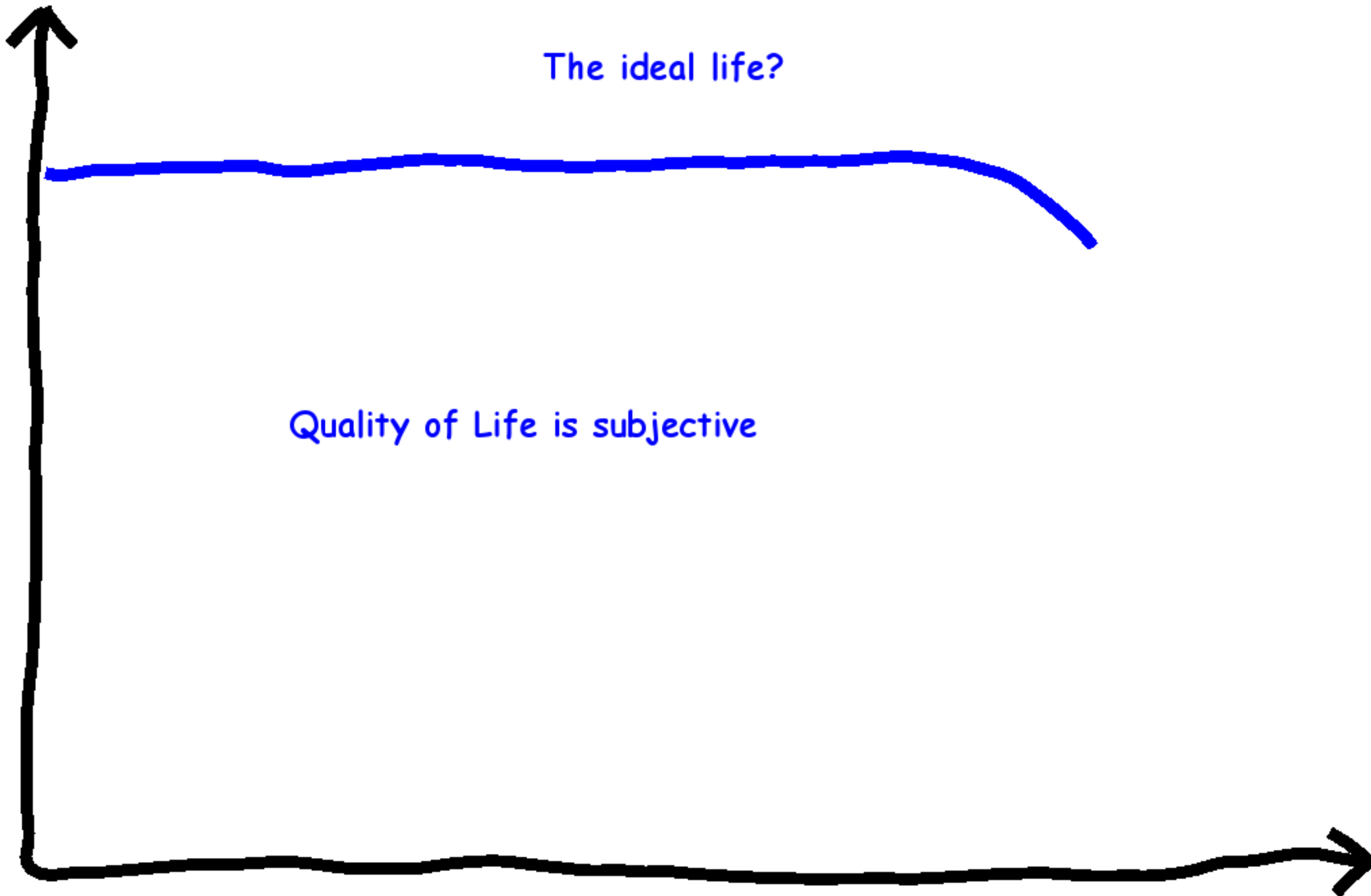


Quality of Life

The ideal life?

Quality of Life is subjective

Age



Cilla Black

Died August 2015 age 72

Cause: a stroke after falling and hitting her head after sunbathing in Spain

Daily Telegraph, August 3rd:

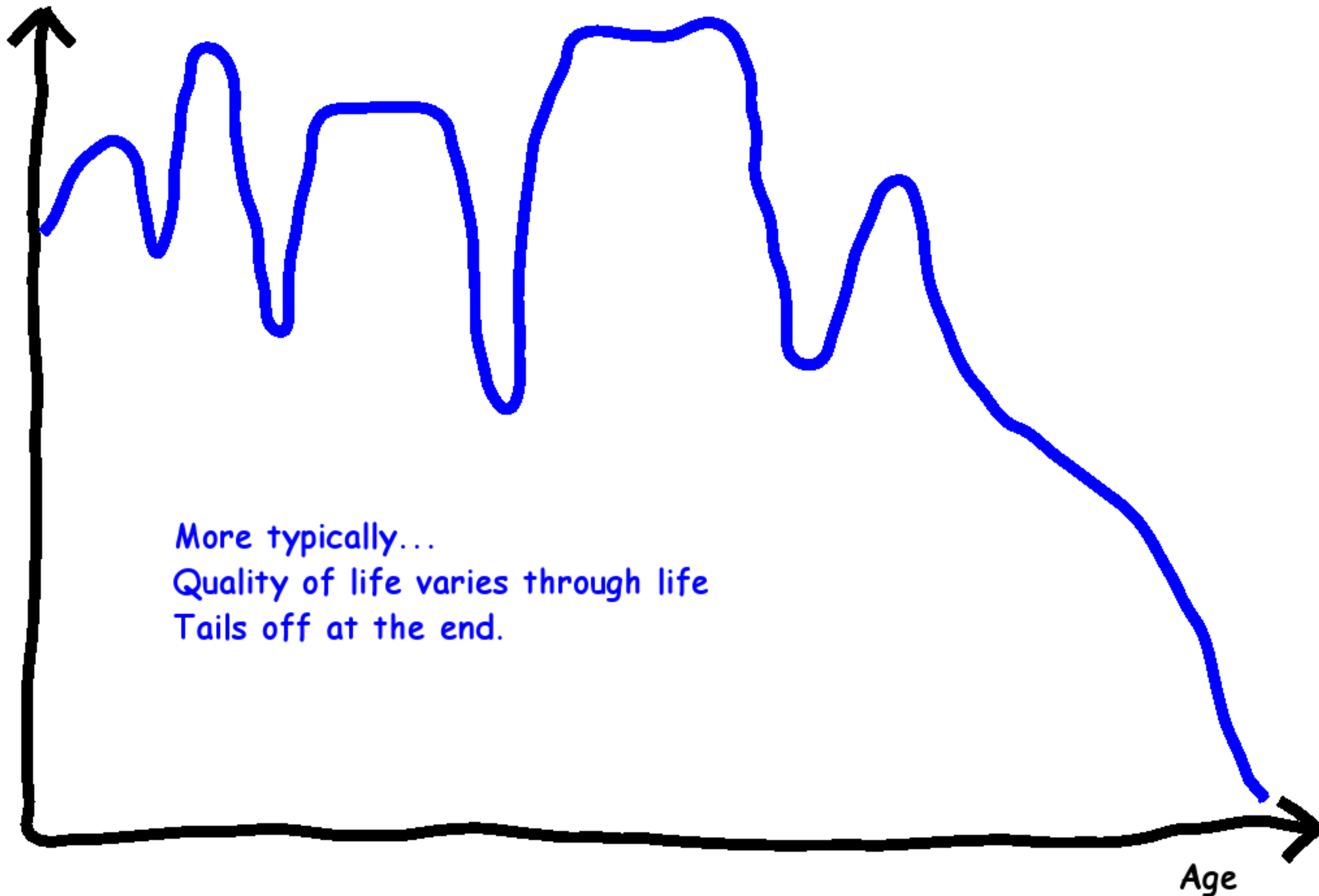
"She made no secret of her desire not to linger into old age"

"The star spoke openly of her desire to **die before illness could rob her of the ability to enjoy life**"

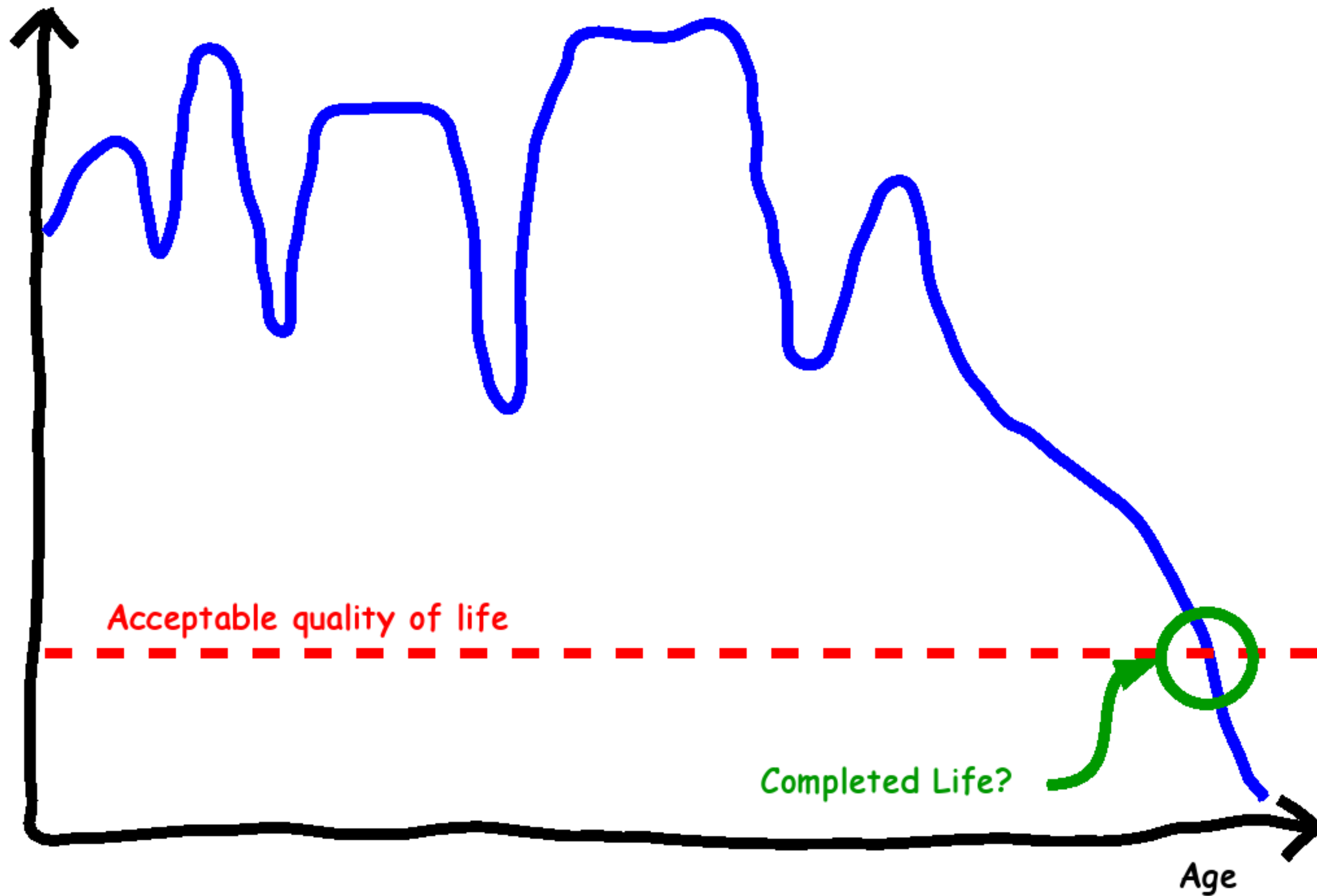
"Seventy-five is a good age to go if things start to drop off. I don't want to linger. **I don't want to be a burden on anybody.** I know that 75 is only four years away, but I take each day as I find it"



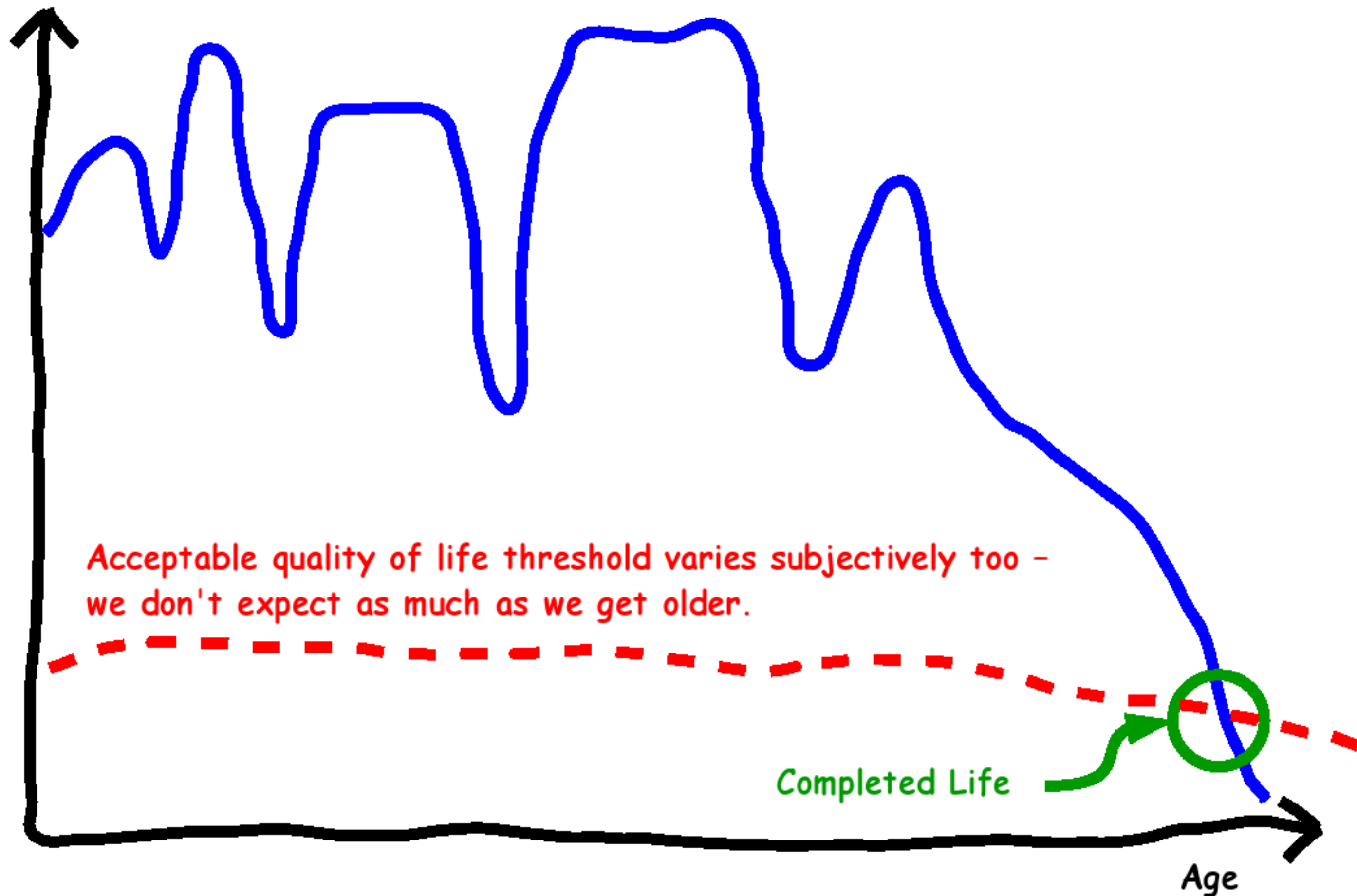
Quality of Life



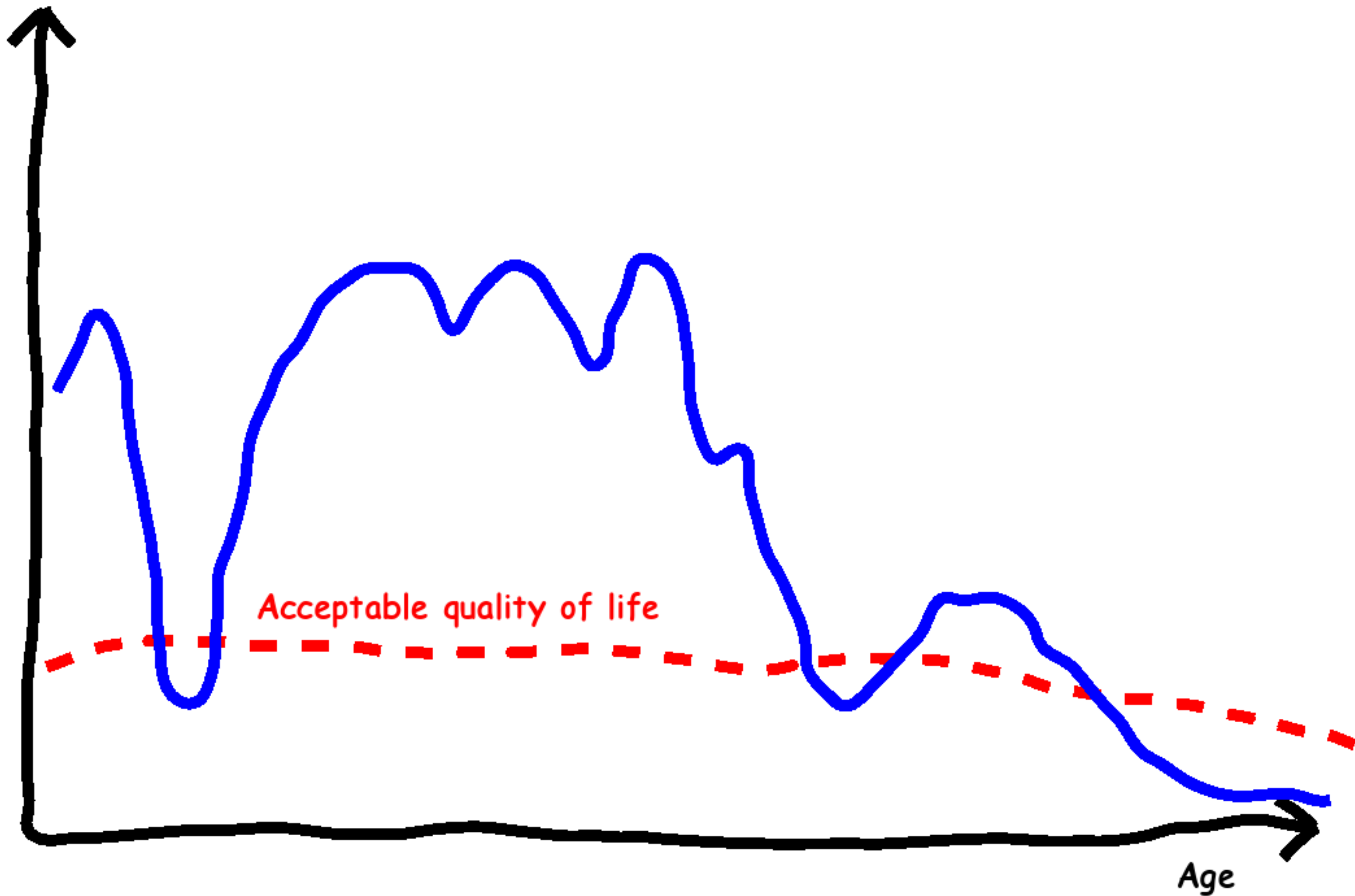
Quality of Life



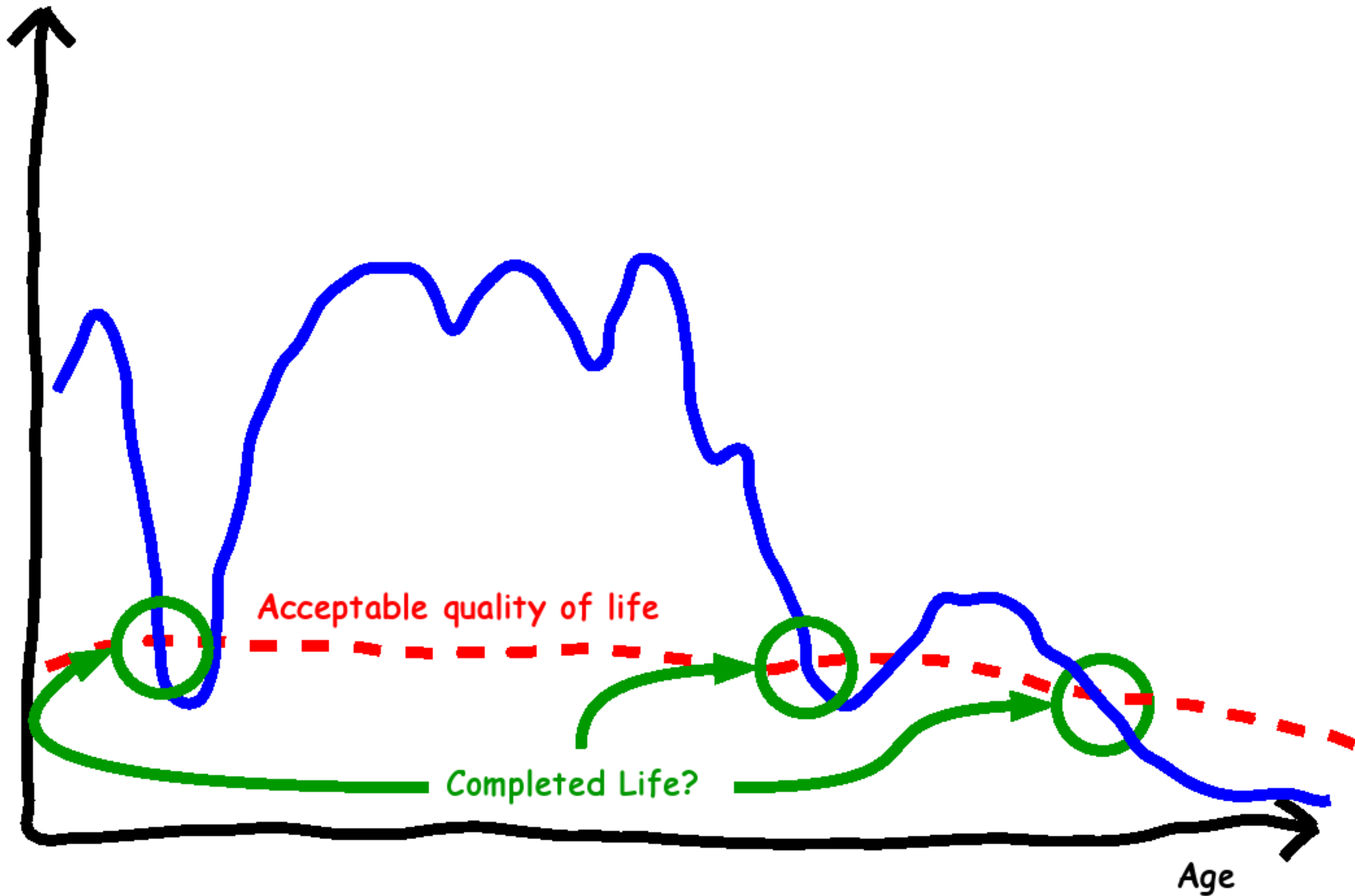
Quality of Life



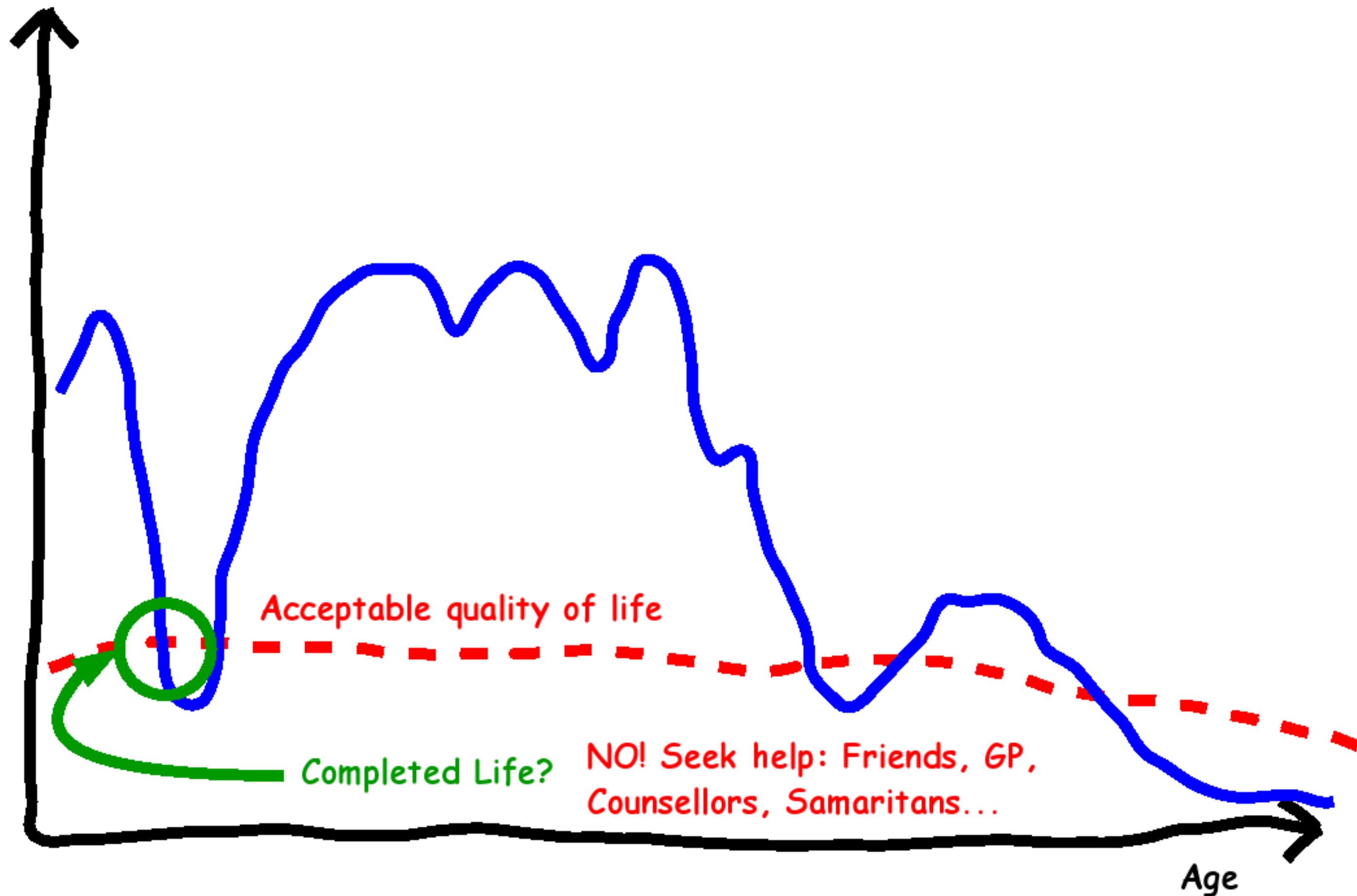
Quality of Life



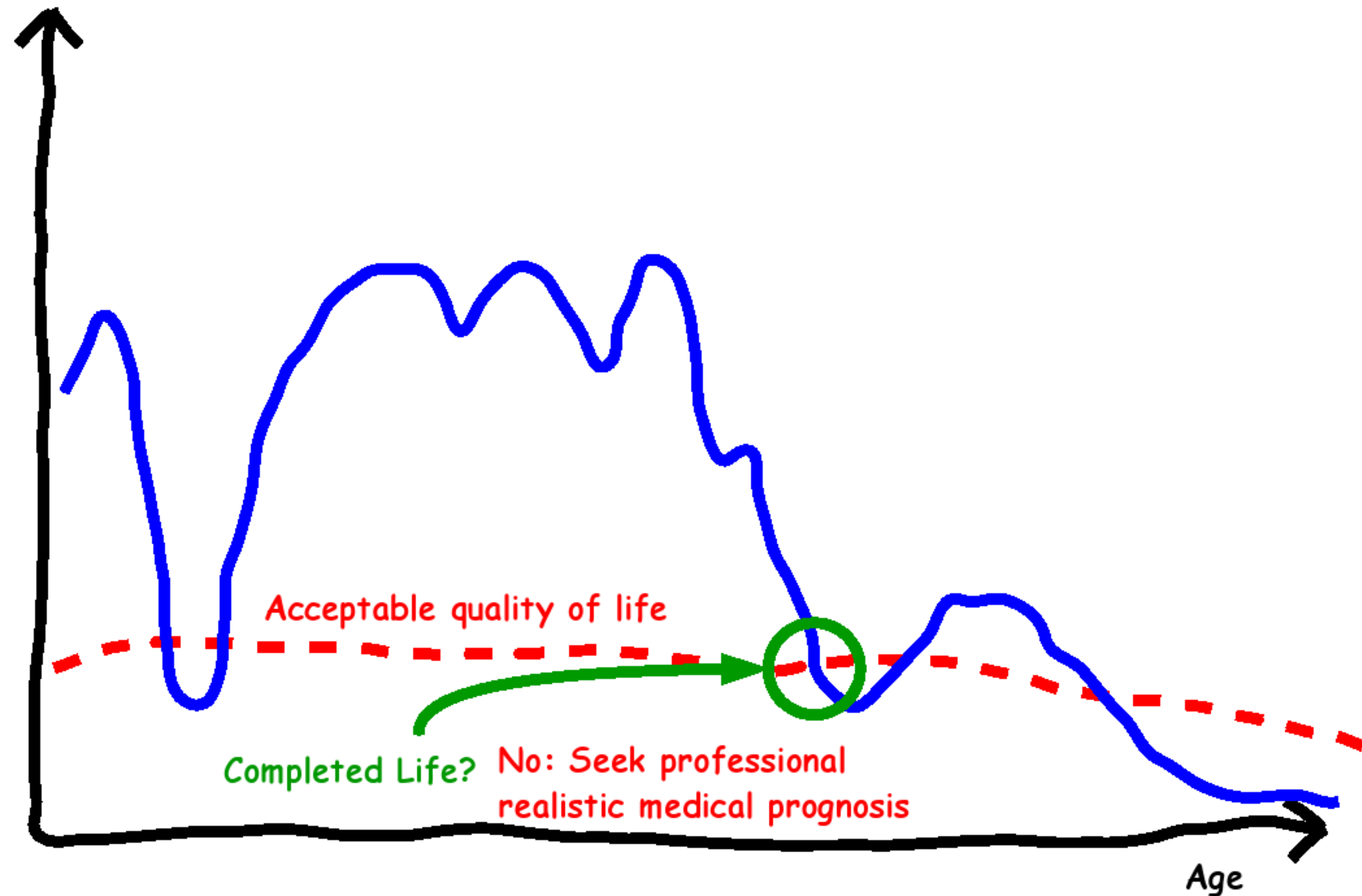
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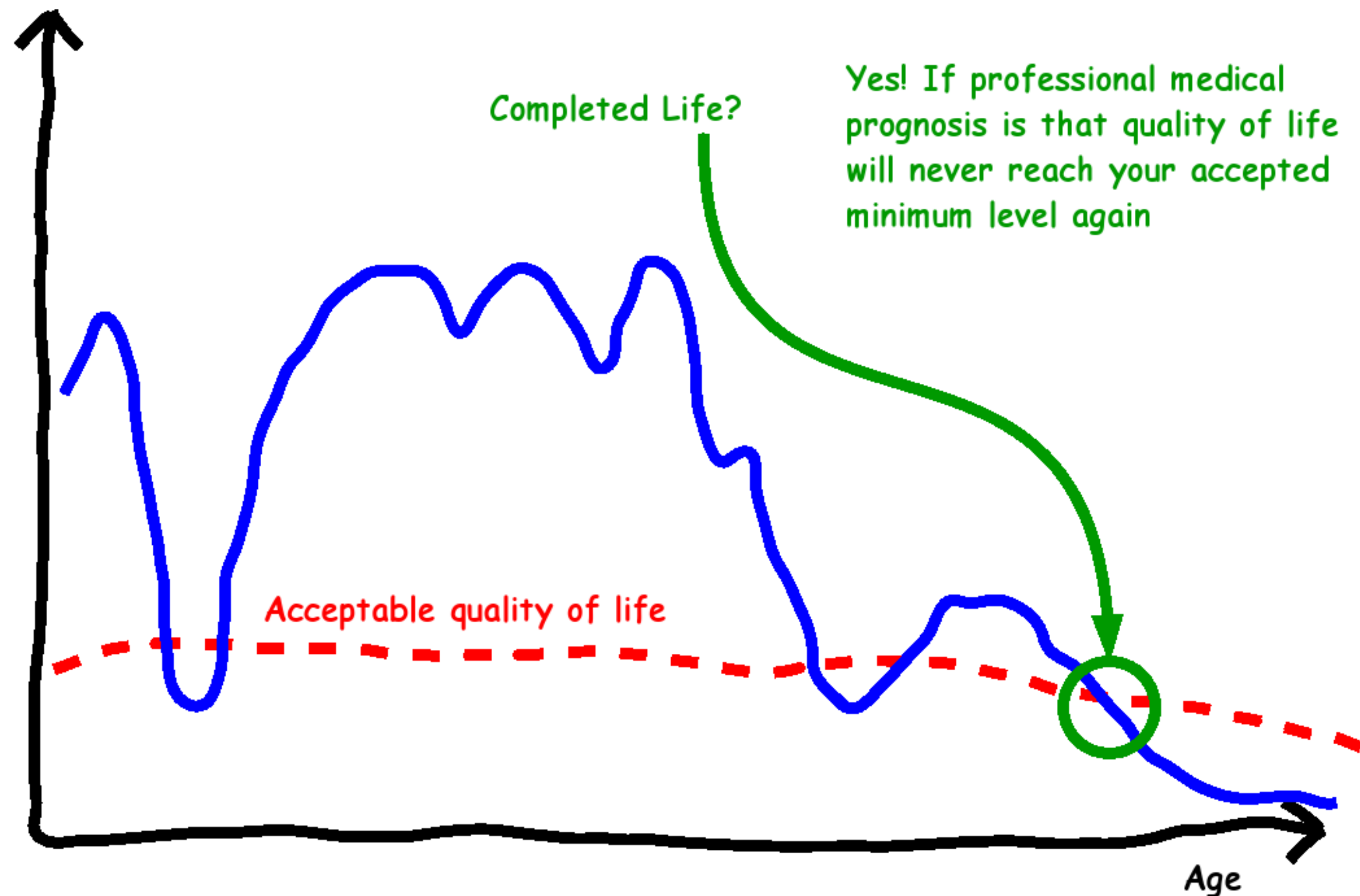
Quality of Life



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Quality of Life



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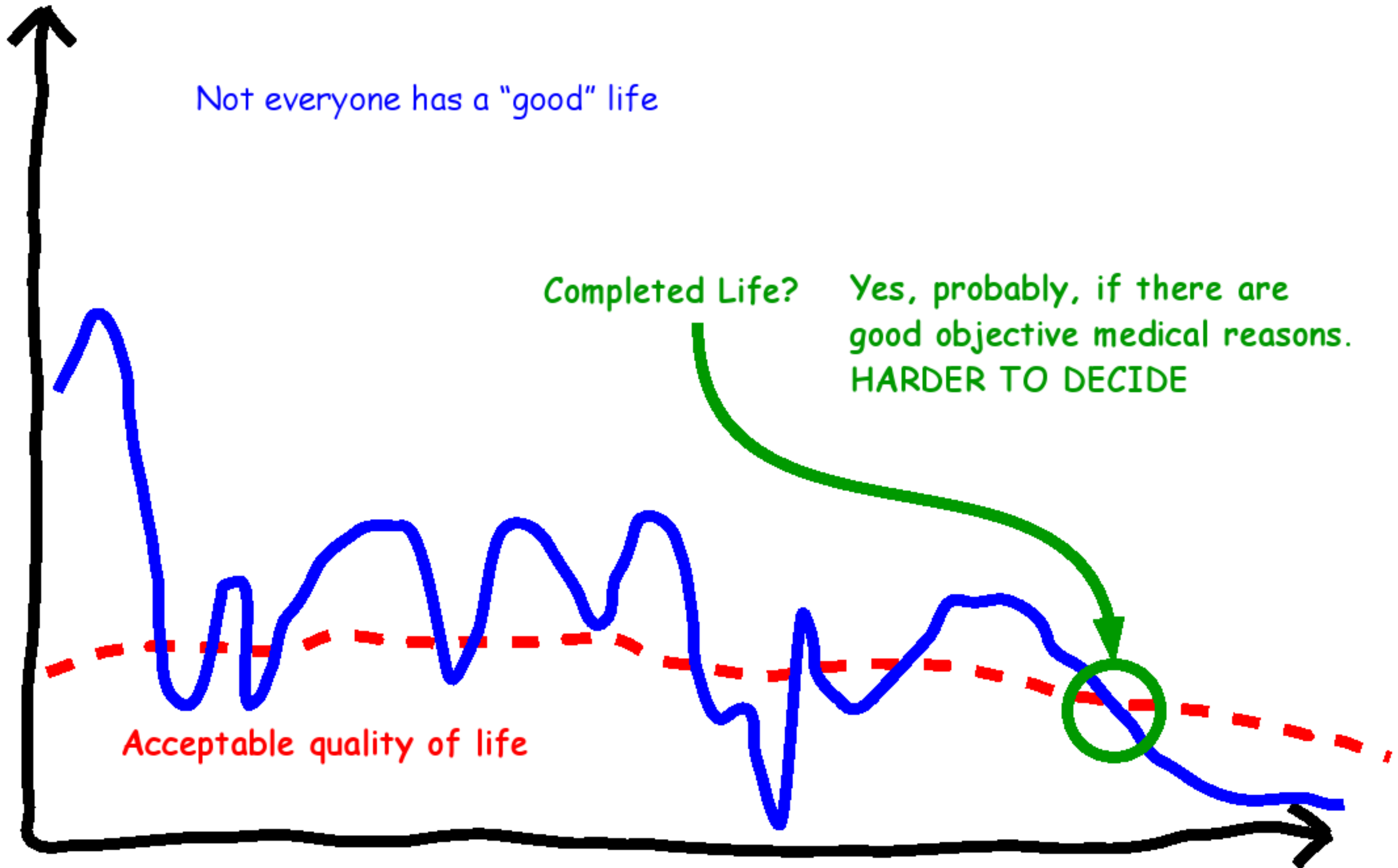
Not everyone has a "good" life

Completed Life?

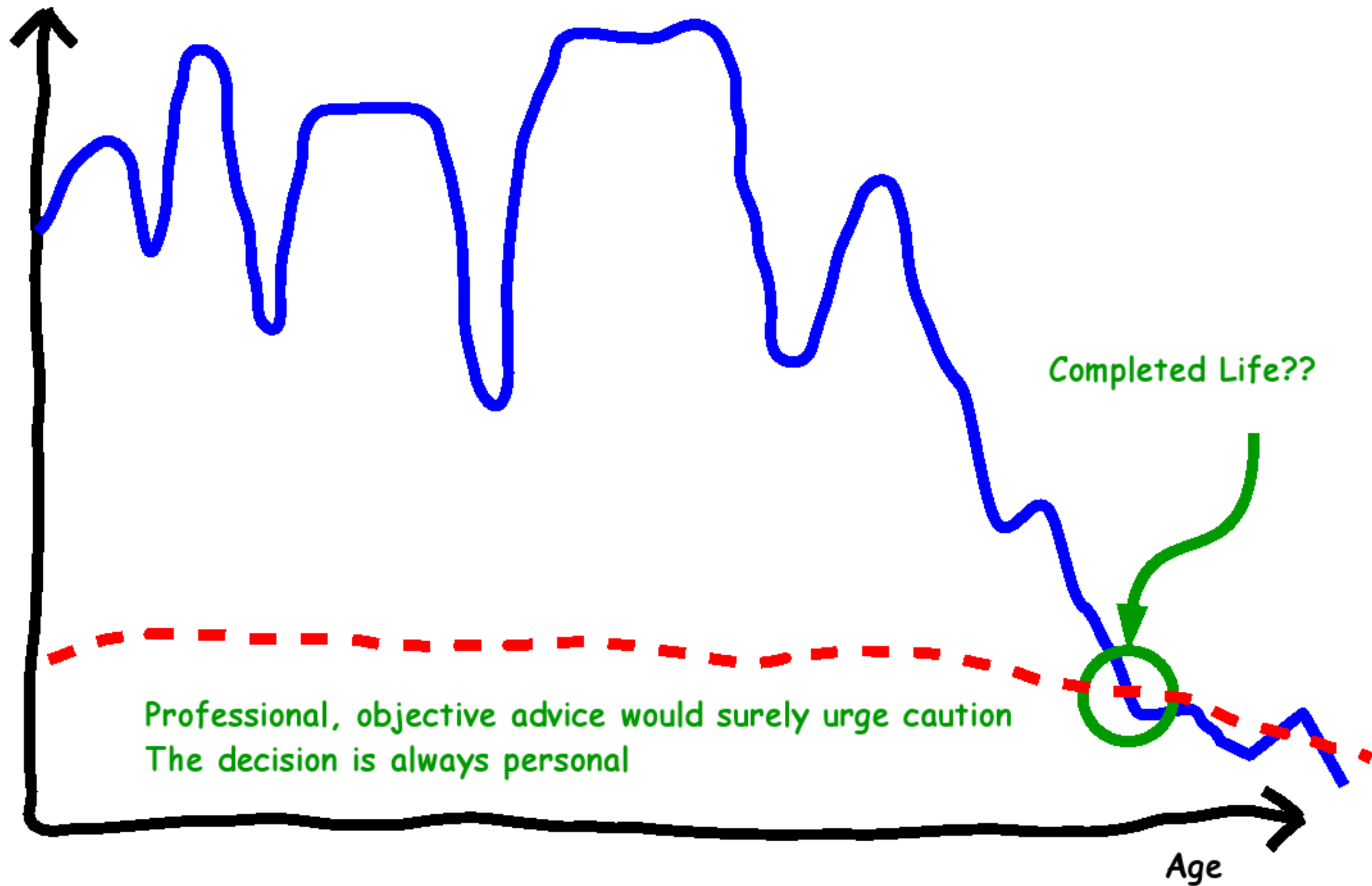
Yes, probably, if there are
good objective medical reasons.
HARDER TO DECIDE

Acceptable quality of life

Age



Quality of Life



Gill Pharoah



Died July 2015 age 75

Cause: Medically assisted suicide at Lifecircle

Gill was reasonably healthy.

From Gill's article "My Last Word":

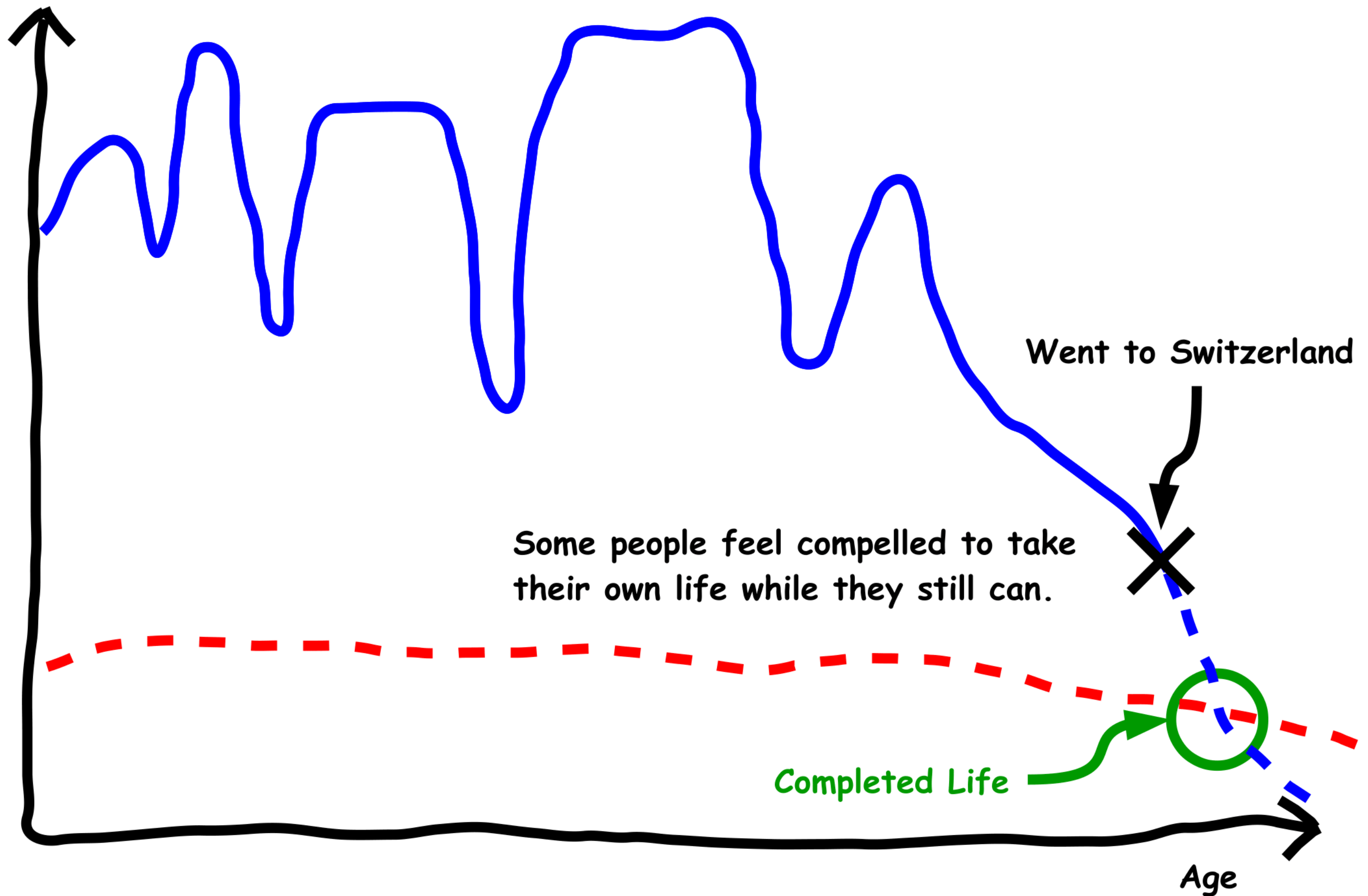
"I feel my life is complete and I am ready to die"

"I have to take action early on because no one else will be able to take action for me."

"I want people to remember me as I am now – a bit worn around the edges and not quite at my peak, but still recognizably me!"

<http://yesiambovvered.com/my-last-word/>

Quality of Life



Why “Completed Life” concept is useful

Make difficult conversations easier

- Help people talk about the issues and their feelings
 - Relatives
 - Friends
 - Medical professionals
- Helps explain personal decisions for those who opt to end their life

“Completed Life” does **NOT necessarily** lead to decision to end life



Questions?