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TABLE OF CONTENT

Editorial.....	3
Julian Warter	
Social Identity and Trust: An Evolutionary Perspective	5
Paulo Finuras	
Transhumanism: Camouflage for the Perpetuation of Eugenic Ideology and Structural Injustice?	19
Sana Loue, Harshita Kuna, Eli McCormick	
Socio-Demographic and Economic Factors Involved in the Consumption of Sexual Explicit Material. Ethical Aspects, Moral Incongruence, and the Frequency of Pornography Use	33
Tudor-Daniel Huțul, Adina Karner-Huțuleac	
The Importance of Questioning and Challenging: A Higher Education Fail?.....	43
Hershey H. Friedman, Svetlana Vlady	
Genetic Enhancement of the Human Being - Between Reality and Fiction, Between Risks and Benefits.....	63
Bianca Hanganu, Irina Smaranda Manoilescu, Beatrice Gabriela Ioan	
Problem Gambling, Depression, Anxiety and Associated Demographics: Findings and Ethical Implications	71
Andreea Huțul, Andrei Corneliu Holman	

TRANSHUMANISM: CAMOUFLAGE FOR THE PERPETUATION OF EUGENIC IDEOLOGY AND STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE?

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Abstract

Transhumanism is a sociopolitical and intellectual movement focused on the use of technology to transform humans and the human experience. Transhumanism promises that, through the use of physical and cognitive enhancements, humans will be able to achieve the “good life.” However, understandings of “enhancement” and “the good life” vary across time, place, and culture. Additionally, the biological modification/elimination of a specific characteristic may lead to not only loss the loss of that feature, but of a specific personal identity as well. The potential consequences of transhumanist enhancement suggest both that they may constitute a newer form of eugenics and that they may lead to the production of new societal inequalities.

Key words: biotechnology, enhancement, eugenics, injustice, posthuman, transhumanism

Introduction

Transhumanism has been variously defined as a “‘technoprogressive’ socio-political and intellectual movement that advocates for the use of technology in order to transform the human organism radically with the ultimate goal of becoming ‘posthuman’” (Porter, 2017, p. 237) and “a movement and system of thought that supports the use of technology to enhance the physical and cognitive power of human beings” (Mohseni, 2018, p. 9). Transhumanists have defined it themselves as:

- (1) The intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.
- (2) The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies (Bostrom, 2003, p. 4).

The vision for a transhuman or posthuman differs from how we think of humans. Our self-understanding as humans encompasses “our essential vulnerability to disease, ageing and death (McNamee & Edwards, 2006, p. 515). Humans are members of the species *Homo sapiens*; it is not clear than transhumanists or posthumanists will be. For example, they may be part human and part machine (cyborgs) or lack any genetic features in common with human beings.

Although the movement purports to be concerned about the potential dangers of using such technologies and the associated ethical questions their use raises, the movement’s primary focus appears to be instead on the identification of ways in which human beings may be enhanced intellectually, psychologically, and physically. Strategies range from the development of superintelligent machines, the recalibration of pleasure centers in the brain, and “personality pills,” to extending life through gene therapy and the uploading of one’s

consciousness into a virtual reality following one's bodily death (Childs Jr., 2015; Rosahl, 2007).¹ Transhumanists assert that the complete attainment of such transformations will lead, as well, to the transformation of transhumans into posthumans. The transhumanist website Humanity+ suggests that posthumans

could be completely synthetic artificial intelligences, or they could be enhanced uploads, or they could be the result of many smaller but cumulatively profound biological augmentations to a biological human. The latter alternative would probably require either the redesign of the human organism using advanced nanotechnology or a radical enhancement using some combination of technologies such as genetic engineering, psychopharmacology, and anti-aging therapies, neural interfaces, advanced information management tools, memory enhancing drugs, wearable computers, and cognitive techniques... Some posthumans might find it advantageous to jettison their bodies altogether and live as information patterns on a vast super-fast computer networks ... Posthuman minds might be able to share memories and experiences directly, greatly increasing the efficiency, quality, and modes in which posthumans could communicate with each other. The boundaries between posthuman minds may not be as sharply defined as those between humans (Humanity+, 2023).

Indeed, some transhumanists envision a time of the Singularity, during which human and machine consciousness will be melded together to comprise a super-connected posthuman civilization that permits increased longevity, the cure of disease, and the elimination of social problems (Hughes, 2012; Paura, 2016).

In essence, transhumanism promises access to “the good life,” without defining precisely what that may be. Accordingly, *who* defines what an enhancement is, *what* constitutes an “enhancement,” *who* should or would have access to such technologies, and the likelihood that such enhancements, if widely used, could effectively eliminate communities of marginalized persons, necessarily raise critical ethical issues. Indeed, transhumanists themselves acknowledge that “Initially, ... the greatest advantages will go to those who have the resources, the skills, and the willingness to learn to use new tools. One can speculate that some technologies may cause social inequalities to widen” (Humanity+, 2023).

This paper explores, first, various approaches to understandings of “the good life,” demonstrating that the framework utilized for such judgments may lead to diverse conclusions. The paper then discusses various types of enhancements, noting that perceptions of enhancement vary across time and place. We then explore the potential use of transhumanist-lauded technologies to eliminate the reproduction of individuals who are deemed to be less socially acceptable, often marginalized, and the links between this use of technology and eugenic ideology. We conclude with several recommendations related to the marketing, distribution, and use of potential enhancements.

Defining the Good Life

Transhumanists have been criticized as wanting to “have it all,” a good life that is unmarred by tragedy, suffering, or unhappiness (Porter, 2017, p. 245). This potential “good life” rests on the maximization of values perceived as positive and the elimination of those perceived to be negative although, as Levin suggests, the perception of some as positive necessarily rests on the existence of and in relation to those deemed to be negative (Levin, 2017).

¹ The Amazon Prime video series Upload depicts a world in which individuals who have died have had their consciences uploaded into a virtual reality. See <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7826376/>.

The philosophical question of what constitutes the “good life” allows us to better explore which of life’s components could be improved upon and/or removed for human beings to reach satisfaction in daily life and whether enhancement is necessary. Elements that are often associated with the concept of a “good life” include: material comfort, well-being, engagement in meaningful activities, loving relationships, and belonging to a community (Veenhoven, 2000). Because the concept of a good life is subjective, understanding what is “good” may be addressed in both a philosophical and cultural context.

In a philosophical context, identifying who should say what constitutes the good life is controversial. Suppose one were to reminisce about their life on their deathbed, and they believed their experience was fulfilling, whereas their loved ones disagree. Who is correct? According to the Greek philosopher Plato, everyone has a natural desire for justice and goodness (Oppong, 2022b). Following this, Aristotle explained that virtue is more than righteous knowledge and includes practicing recognition of good behaviors (Oppong, 2022a). Aristotle believed that living a good life consists of education and skills, like prudence or self-control.

We can conceive of the technological advances that humans have made as a monumental aspect of human evolution, comparable in a sense to the tools that our ancestors needed, fashioned, and used to expand and grow. All technology comes from the natural world. Human beings use elements of the environment to create tools, technologies, and dwellings to further their survival, perpetuation, and desires (Ostler, 2018). Expanding our abilities with more sophisticated technologies may be seen as a form of adaptation that is consistently seen in nature. Whether it be Darwin’s finches or the endosymbiotic theory, we and the world that we inhabit are constantly evolving. If transcending our limitations is a natural phenomenon, then we must do so safely to assist our species.

Studying aspects of a ‘good life’ may also be accomplished by utilizing a multicultural approach. Multiculturalism suggests that the contributions of diverse societies and their specific differences can be respected without demanding that they assimilate into a dominant culture (Longley, 2020). Using this approach, we can observe specific cultures and compare them to U.S. views of what a good life encompasses. We can investigate the cultures of the U.S., European countries, and Ecuador, and see how all three regions have specific ways of living.²

U.S. notions of the “good life” tend to reflect specific themes, such as material abundance, religion, and education. Material abundance may refer to land occupation, democracy, and government programs to promote such an abundance (Kroes, 2015; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Many U.S. Americans take pride in their right to vote, their political affiliations, and their moral views reflected through their political affiliations. Education is also an important U.S. ideal as it is believed that pursuing educational opportunities and graduating from college, for example, is required in order to enjoy a good life. Related to the concept of “hard work,” the push for capitalism in America has manifested for centuries, reflected in its enterprising shopkeepers, wildcat banks, violent slave plantations, huge industrial working class, and commodity trades. Deriving from social class views, the relationship between capitalism and individualism is complex yet contingent. Capitalism has had varied impacts on how Americans have understood themselves as individual citizens and in their relationship with the nation as a whole (Benke, 2022). Achieving a good life in American culture is thought to require specific sacrifices and extending oneself by individualistic and materialistic means.

² In this paper, the use of U.S. culture will refer to the various distinct social behaviors, institutions, and norms of the United States including the following: dialect, music, arts, social habits, and folklore.

The concept of a good life in some European countries contrasts significantly with that in the United States. Sweden is reported to be one of the happiest countries to live in because of its focus on minimalism, sustainability, and connection to nature (Scroope, 2017). Sweden is politically stable because of an efficient health system that reaches income equality. People who reside in Sweden would most likely recognize a good life with the qualities that make their country prosper, as corruption is low and in favor of the citizens. In Germany, individuals have assumed a pragmatic approach to a good life where hard work and punctuality are valued. Even though this may be similar to the American value of a strong work ethic, Germans are said to believe that a good quality of life stems from balance, as evidenced in the country's free education. Eliminating stressors like paying for basic human necessities can assist people to prioritize favorable aspects of life.

In Ecuador, the Buen Vivir movement is a social philosophy movement that is loosely translated to "good life." Buen Vivir, rooted in the cosmovisión of the Quechua peoples of the Andes, describes a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically balanced, and culturally sensitive (Balch, 2013). Buen Vivir is a far stretch from traditional American capitalism. The good life in Ecuadorian culture consists of reducing consumption and limiting capitalistic rituals. A recently revised Ecuadorian constitution upon which Buen Vivir is built through the integration of its indigenous past and concepts of *sumak kawsay* is the following: "We...hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living" (Berros, 2015).

This brief comparison suggests that a society's view of the good life and how it can be achieved has implications for the acceptance or rejection of transhumanistic ideology and measures. If transhumanism successfully became a global effort achievement, regions of the world that would benefit from the capital, such as the US, would thrive in this case. However, other countries would agree that the use of advanced technology for the sake of unnecessary human enhancement is far too individualistic.

The desire to have enhancements outside of the human necessity of functioning raises the subject of materialism, a core characteristic of global consumer culture. Because materialism is a social construct that focuses on and exalts possession, obtaining the "high-end" technological privileges promised by transhumanism is a reasonable possibility. Research indicates that highly materialistic individuals report lower levels of well-being, including lower life satisfaction, higher levels of depression and anxiety, and a lower sense of purpose in life (Isham et al., 2022). To elaborate, individuals who perceive their own lives as lackluster may seek materialistic ways to improve their living conditions. When considering transhumanistic enhancements, these same individuals might wish to incorporate a "brain scanning chip" to feel "better." This potentially signifies the start of the proverbial "slippery slope," as we then contemplate what makes "feeling better" feeling "more better."

What Is an Enhancement?

In general, we can think of human enhancements as those technologies or materials that improve, modify or supplement the traits or abilities that an individual has from birth (see Almeida & Diogo, 2019). Juengst has defined "enhancement" as "interventions designed to improve human form or functioning beyond what is necessary to restore good health" (Juengst, 1998, p.29), asserting that "enhancement interventions are any interventions designed to produce improvements in human form or function that do not respond to legitimate medical needs" (Juengst, 1998, p. 31). Transhumanists argue that utilization of technological or material enhancements enhances the likelihood of attaining the "good life." Currently existing enhancements include medications used to enhance individuals' ability to learn, think, or function; prosthetics that replace limbs and permit individuals to regain their daily functionality; implants that restore individuals' senses; genetic engineering to prevent

birth defects; and surgeries to correct improperly functioning body organs (Almeida & Diogo, 2019; Bostrom & Roache, 2008; Roco & Bainbridge, 2003). We can consider several examples that underscore diverse views of what may constitute an enhancement.

Evidence suggests that artificial limbs and prosthetics have been used since the time of ancient Egyptians for function, cosmetic appearance, and a psycho-spiritual sense of wholeness (Thurston, 2007). During the Dark Ages, generally thought to be between the fifth and fourteenth centuries, prosthetics for battle and for hiding deformities were made of heavy material that was readily available such as wood, metal, and leather. By the time of the late fifteenth century, additional prostheses were available, but the materials used were costly and only noble families or those who fought as knights could afford such enhancements. Knights were often fitted with prostheses, mostly arm or hand replacements, to replace those body parts lost in battle and to enable them to continue to serve on the battlefield (Thurston, 2007).

Over time, prosthetic design has grown to include highly specialized technologies such as high performance, lightweight running blades, responsive legs/feet for navigating different terrain, and motorized hand prosthetics controlled by sensors and microprocessors (UPMC). Today's prosthetics are much more advanced and accessible compared to those of earlier eras, but many of the most sophisticated and complex prostheses remain out of reach financially for those without adequate health insurance or private funds.

Māori tattoos are seen across all of the Polynesian Triangle and provide yet another example of human enhancement. The word tattoo itself is derived from the Tahitian word *Tatau* and translates to 'strike' or 'hit' (Nyssen, 2018). Although the origins of Māori tattoos are unclear, the actual significance of these unique art pieces is far more than aesthetic purposes; Māori tattoo art is a language, a symbol of power, and a mark of honor in traditional Polynesian society (Hill, 2016). Tattoos are also used as a means of distinguishing oneself, to display social status, and for courage/power purposes. A specific image on the body can also depict acts of bravery, such as fighting in a war, or they may signify a specific occupation. Common symbols seen amongst Polynesian individuals include *Enata* (human figures), shark teeth, spearheads, the ocean, tikis, turtles, lizards, and dolphins. Tattoos, noted to be body modifications due to the physical alteration of the body, are considered to be human enhancements. Many types of physical alterations to the body confer significant benefits, such as enhancing confidence, self image, self expression, supernatural protection, and, in specific cultural contexts, preserve cultural identity/sociocultural concepts of beauty.

This brief sampling of procedures and compensatory measures suggests that some, but not all, enhancements may also constitute a medical treatment or therapy, i.e., a procedure, treatment, or therapy that is designed to "maintain, restore, or compensate for the restricted opportunity and function by disease and disability" (Parens, 1998, p. 2). While an enhancement, such as a prosthetic device, may fulfill this purpose, this cannot be said to be true of all enhancements, such as tattoos. We suggest, accordingly, that human enhancement technologies may be beneficial if they (1) increase pleasurable feelings or mitigate painful or unpleasant ones; (2) allow humans to accomplish individually or collectively goals that would otherwise be difficult, challenging, or impossible; and (3) accomplish (1) and (2) without major negative side effects for either the individual or the collective and provide overall benefit for the individual and/or society.

Transhumanism, Eugenics, and Less-Than-"Perfect" Persons

The term "eugenics," derived from the Greek roots for "good" and "origin," has been attributed to Francis Galton, who used the word in 1883 to define the science of breeding a better race (Weindling, 2021). Galton (1908) was concerned that individuals who were "degenerate," so labeled based on their social characteristics and mental abilities, maintained a higher rate of reproduction compared with fit and healthy persons, who were restricting

their reproduction. The science of eugenics would correct this perceived imbalance, thereby enabling society as whole to achieve the “good life.”

Accordingly, eugenic theory was premised on a belief in genetic/biological determinism (Selden, 2005) and promised the “self direction of human evolution.” Eugenic proponents linked a perceived decline in population quality to inherited qualities and differential birthrate, often blaming targeted groups for recurrent social problems (Allen, 1997). Biological metaphors were utilized to shape social policies, including those relating to immigration, segregation, and sterilization (see Ellis, 1912).

The transnational eugenics movement that flourished in Western countries from 1900 through 1940 was driven by a variety of factors. There was widespread economic and social instability, due in part to increasing industrialization. Medicine was seen as a national resource and scientists were viewed and viewed themselves as a special class of concerned experts (Leonard, 2003). The surgeon and eugenicist J. Ewing Mears (1909) proclaimed, “The members of our profession are not only the conservators of the public health, but are, or should be, in every sense the promoters of the public good.” Rivalries erupted between eugenicists and practitioners of various health sciences with respect to the appropriateness of their touted interventions to prevent and treat disease, with professional power and ownership of the relevant terrain in play (Pernick, 1997). Rational scientific planning offered the possibility and the hope that human resources could be preserved for the benefit of future generations and enhance efficiency.

The implementation of eugenic theory assumed a variety of forms across countries. In the United States, the lines between genetic research and eugenics were quite blurred, a situation exemplified by the dual roles held by Charles Davenport, both a leading biological scientist and the head of two organizations that funded eugenic research (Duster, 2003). Eugenic efforts frequently utilized two approaches. What has been referred to as “negative eugenics” focused on eliminating what have been characterized as “negative traits.” These strategies were designed to decrease reproduction in families deemed to have inferior hereditary qualities, e.g., through the involuntary and often unknowing sterilization of individuals deemed to be “feeble-minded” or “imbeciles”, eugenic marriage laws that prohibited the marriage of individuals with sexually transmitted infections, and the passage of anti-miscegenation laws to enforce racial segregation. Restrictive immigration laws would serve to prohibit the new addition of such persons into the country (Dorr, 2008; Ellis, 1912; Okrent, 2020; Reilly, 2015). The burden of these negative measures fell predominantly on immigrants, the poor, and minority persons (see Leonard, 2003).

The second approach employed so-called “positive” eugenic measures. These measures sought to encourage the proliferation of better health and higher intelligence across the population by promoting reproduction among those deemed to be healthy and fit and by recognizing and rewarding those who were believed to best exemplify positive traits. In the United States, positive eugenic strategies often assumed the form of “better baby” and “fitter family” contests, frequently accompanied by government-supported propaganda intended to influence individuals’ reproductive decisions (Pernick, 2002; Selden, 2005). These measures, the positive and the negative, would act together to control the ability of those deemed undesirable to reproduce.

The use of “negative” eugenic measures to reshape social policy and society was carried to its extreme under the Nazi regime. Borrowing from the U.S. models for anti-miscegenation and involuntary sterilization (Bergin, 2016; David, Fleischhacker, & Höhn, 1988), the Nazi government instituted gradually escalating measures designed to improve what was conceived of as the Aryan race and eliminate those deemed to be inferior: the segregation and stigmatization of groups, involuntary sterilization, euthanasia and, finally, an effort to completely exterminate disfavored groups from within the population (Bergin,

2016). Those deemed to be defective would not only be prevented from reproducing, but were to be themselves eliminated.

Just as with the eugenic movement, an underlying belief in the ability of science to fuel progress is helping to propel the transhumanist movement forward without, in the opinion of the authors, sufficient consideration of potential consequences. As one example, new biotechnologies have been embraced for their ability to identify the potential for genetic disorders, leading to a “growing acceptance of the notion that ‘defective’ babies can be prevented” (Duster, 2003, p. xii) and the ability to identify and associate specific genetic disorders with specific racial and ethnic groups (Duster, 2003). Although apparent consensus exists that neonatal testing is morally justified in situations in which a disease causes harm or where early intervention confers a benefit, there is an absence of needed broad debate or consensus regarding the boundary between difference and defect, what exactly constitutes a defect, and what should be prevented, even if preventable.

Consider as an example the following hypothetical situation. Genetic testing may be conducted at any of six points in time: (1) during the neonatal period; (2) prenatally, between implantation and birth; (3) during the preimplantation stage of embryonic development, following in vitro fertilization; (4) during the pre-fertilization stage, before in vitro fertilization; (5) when couples are considering whether to reproduce; or (6) when a person recognizes a higher-than-average risk of developing a particular disease later in life (American Medical Association, 2021). Suppose that it becomes possible to assess the probability of giving birth to homosexual offspring through genetic testing or, even if it is not, that people come to believe that a genetic test could, indeed, apprise them of the likelihood of giving birth to a baby who would later display same-sex attraction. Indeed, despite research findings and scientists’ advisories that genetics alone cannot predict an individual’s sexual orientation (Ganna et al., 2019; Lambert, 2019), apps are now available that ostensibly can provide consumers with a same-sex attraction score based on an analysis of their DNA (Kwon, 2019). Either scenario could lead to the imposition or adoption of what some might consider “positive” eugenic measures, e.g., discouragement, whether legally or through social pressure, to reduce the number of unions that could lead to such births and/or decisions by couples not to have children based on their belief that individuals with same-sex attraction are more likely to face discrimination and experience unhappiness. This scenario necessarily raises numerous ethical issues: whether a potential ability to modify sexual orientation in utero could be considered an enhancement to improve an individual’s functioning, and therefore a “positive” strategy, whether the in utero modification constitutes an effort to eliminate persons with a specific characteristic (see Thomas and Rothman, 2016 and their discussion of Down syndrome), akin to the efforts of eugenicists vis-à-vis specific populations; and whether, in what manner, and to what extent government entities should intervene or regulate the practice, again recalling the involvement of state agencies and actors in the involuntary sterilization of those deemed to be “feeble-minded.” Both the in utero modification of sexual orientation and the elimination of individuals with Down syndrome following prenatal testing result signify not only a biological modification/elimination but the loss of a specific personal identity as well.

The scenario is not as farfetched as it may seem initially. There have been numerous efforts to identify the biological and genetic influences that determine sexual preference among males (Hamer et al., 1993; LeVay, 1991), as well as calls to proactively eliminate homosexuality through genetic testing, should it become possible to identify those genetic factors primarily responsible for same-sex orientation (see Yoder, 2019). It is not that long ago that homosexuality was considered to be a mental disease or disorder (Burton, 2015), reflective of a psychopathic personality (Schmeiser, 2008). Indeed, some mental health professionals continue to portray same-sex attraction as a pathological disturbance in need of

a cure (Friedman, 1988; Socarides, 1995; Vider & Byers, 2015). Research conducted by individuals within a homophobic framework, whether due to personal bias or societal hostility, may produce biased research findings and/or jeopardize the safety of research participants (see, e.g., Dörner, 1989).

While this hypothetical situation is possibly an extreme example of the risks of more subtle forms of positive eugenics, it amply demonstrates the dangers associated with a too-eager embrace and acceptance of scientific ways of knowing in the absence of an adequate exploration of and attunement to the larger social and political contexts (Kwon, 2019; Maxmen, 2019). This imagined scenario underscores as well the ease with which already-stigmatized groups may be further stigmatized as the result of a failure to consider the messaging implicit in approaches that rest on positive eugenics.

Transhumanism, Moral Equality, and Distributive Justice

Moral egalitarians assert that all moral persons are to be treated as equals, that none should be treated as less than equal, and that none should be treated as more than equal (Wilson, 2007). Concerns have been raised, however, that enhanced individuals will be treated as morally superior to those who are unenhanced, and the enhanced will view the lives of the unenhanced as less important from a moral point of view (Fukuyama, 2002). This concern mirrors the ethical issues raised by eugenics, noted above.

We can consider here the relationship between disability and society and the implications for both transhumanism and distributive justice. Rawls suggested that individuals with similar levels of talent and ability as well as a willingness to use those talents and abilities should have the same opportunities for success (Rawls, 1971). Within the Rawlsian framework there is the proposition that talent and knowledge are not necessarily private possessions:

The difference principle represents, in effect, an agreement to regard the distribution of natural talents as in some respects a common asset and to share in the greater social and economic benefits made possible by the complementarities of this distribution. Those who have been favored by nature, whoever they are, may gain from their good fortune only on terms that improve the situation of those who have lost out.” (Rawls, 1999, p. 87).

Additionally, Rawls maintained that the distribution of social and economic benefits should be implemented in such a way that they can be reasonably expected to be advantageous to those persons who are worst off: “All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls, 1999, p. 54). Among the “social and economic benefits” to which Rawls refers we can fairly add the benefit of health. Such distributive justice works to offset or compensate for differences in fortune that impact our lives. Accordingly, justice is independent of luck and suggests a more equal distribution of harms and benefits.

We might consider first the implications of transhumanist enhancements for the distribution of economic benefits. The proliferation of enhancements envisioned by transhumanists could potentially lead to humans’ displacement by machines. Research has found that for every robot added per 1,000 workers in the U.S., wages decline by 0.42% and the employment-to-population ratio goes down by 0.2 percentage points (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020). It is now anticipated that new automation will eliminate millions of jobs for vehicle drivers, retail workers health care workers, lawyers, accountants, and finance specialists, among others (Holzer, 2022). Those who desire and are able to financially access specific enhancement may well find that their lives are easier, more relaxed, more comfortable—in other words, that they have moved closer to their ideal of the “good life.”

However, those who have been displaced from their employment by machines, cyborgs, or posthumans may find that enhancements designed to achieve the “good life” are more beyond their reach than ever and that the effects of enhancements has been the exacerbation of the socioeconomic divide.

Consider now a person who is deemed to be disabled. Disability is not a static state of being, but rather exists in relation to a specific environment and/or specific function or activity, in a specific time and place (Moser, 2006). Medicine might seek to utilize procedures or treatments to diminish the impact of or cure the disability in an effort to bring the individual to whatever baseline is considered the norm and reduce any impediments to the achievement of the “good life” (Satz, 2006). However, the principle of distributive justice suggests that we have a responsibility to redesign our world in such a way that accessibility is assured for, or at least maximized, for all regardless of their capabilities. Because individuals, though, have varying levels of capability, this raises further the question of the extent to which our environment should be or could be redesigned.

In discussing the enhancement of an individual in order to participate in an elite sport event, van Hilvoorde and Landeweerd observed:

If one were to grant a disabled person’s desire to become part of a ‘normal’ elite sport by enhancing one or more aspects of his body, this may be framed as a way of ‘inclusion’ or ‘integration’. At the same time, this reproduces new inequalities and asymmetries between performances of the able and dis-abled bodied. To enhance the traits needed to function optimally in a society, is to take that society as the proper standard against which the functioning of people is legitimately judged (van Hilvoorde & Landeweerd, 2010, p. 2223).

Similarly, if transhumanist enhancements become the new societal standard, those who remain unenhanced may be regarded as the dis-abled bodied, such that a new inequality is produced.

Conclusion

Implicit in any conception of what constitutes a “good life” are the normative and socio-cultural perspectives of the concept’s progenitors. Nineteenth century British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor’s theory of cultural evolution proposed that human societies went through a linear progression from savage to barbarian to civilized (Tylor, 1871). Coupled with other theories of cultural evolution at the time, Tylor’s branding of non-white, non-British cultures as savage or primitive engendered a harmful form of scientific racism. We have endeavored to show that similar normative positionalities are implicit in transhumanist conceptions of the good life, going so far as to at least verge on eugenics. While mainstream transhumanists may be unlikely to consciously endorse a formal eugenics program, the transhumanist philosophy decrying death and illness implicitly privileges those who are not affected by disease and disability as ideal bodies. According to this ideology, those who are sick or disabled ought to be “fixed” or “enhanced.”

This is not to say that technologies which purport to heal or otherwise assist humans should not be developed or used. Instead, these technologies should be developed and marketed within a framework of sensitivity to principles of distributive justice, societal stigma and biases, and disability justice. To this end we make the following recommendations. First, so-called “enhancement” technologies should be marketed based on a just distribution that does not unfairly privilege any one class or group of people. Instead of exacerbating current socio-economic divides, any utility stemming from the development and issue of enhancement technologies should be fairly and equitably distributed. Second, developers of enhancement technologies and transhumanists alike should work towards becoming aware of any implicit biases they may hold in reference to particular types of

bodies or conceptions of a “good life” to ensure that they are not adding to any current forms of stigma. This is related to our third recommendation encompassing disability justice. The philosophy of transhumanism can lead to stigmatizing individuals with disabilities, those who have bodies considered “abnormal” or less than “ideal,” and those now considered “normal” who remain un-enhanced. Both positive and negative forms of eugenics—related to transhumanism’s quest for the perfect body—stigmatize disabled bodies and should be curtailed. The authors recommend that transhumanists ought to embrace the idea that there are varied forms of what constitute a “good life” and modifying the human form in any way is not a prerequisite.

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