

Transhumanism and Its Impact on The Future of Humanity

Kyle Ward

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Dr. Liz Johnson

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Abstract

“The History of Man "Playing God" is one of deepest subjugation and destruction. We proclaim the good but are unable to break from that which is evil; we are incapable of resisting the allure to become a god *made in our fallen image*.” (Teichrib, 2018). Often times scientists are so occupied with playing God that we do not stop to think about the consequences our work can have. This is specifically true in the realm of transhumanism. Transhumanism is “the social and philosophical movement devoted to promoting the research and development of human-enhancement technologies” (Britannica.com, 2021). Soon we will become so fixated on upgrading ourselves through cybernetic or digital means that we will fail to see that in our relentless pursuit of forced evolution, we’re destroying that which makes us human. The problem we face is: at what point do we begin sabotaging our humanity and is it worth it? As a computer science major, my purpose for writing this research paper is to discover and analyze upcoming human-enhancement technologies and discuss the social and physiological impacts they can have on humanity.

History of Transhumanism

In addressing transhumanism in relation to human enhancement, it is critical to address the historical, scientific, and ethical perspectives. In order to understand where humanity is going, we must first take a look at where we have been. The first major technological augmentation came in 1992 with the invention of the world's first smartphone, the Simon Personal Communicator by IBM (NCSU, 2017). The mobility of this device allowed for people to carry it with them wherever they went. Thus, allowing people to have a computer on them at all times. In modern society, smartphones have become more than just a tool to communicate; It has become an extension of ourselves. Whether it be through social media or just casual web browsing, there is a digital 'copy' of us created through our interactions on the internet.

Also, with the increase in technological advancements, particularly AI, continuing to be exponential, we will eventually be faced with an existential issue: How do we keep up? On our current course, it is inevitable that man will have to interface with machines on a much deeper level to maintain our status as apex predators. Recently, a small start-up company by the name Neuralink has been trying to tackle this issue by developing a computer chip, "The Link," that will interface directly with neurons in our brains (Neuralink, 2021). The end goal of this technology is to essentially place a computer within our brain to greatly increase a vast number of cognitive functions. However, this type of technology poses numerous security and ethical concerns. The most prominent of which being the main issue this paper strives to explore: at what point do we begin sacrificing our humanity for these augmentations? Do the rewards outweigh the risks?

A Scientific Analysis

Secondly, a scientific perspective provides insight from the greatest minds in the field concerning destruction of humanity as posed by transhumanism. Cordeiro (2015) writes:

“Natural selection with trial and error can now be supplemented by technical selection with engineering design. Humanity’s monopoly as the only advanced sentient life-form on the planet is coming to an end...” I concur with Cordeiro’s evaluation of humanity’s current status. Our seat at the top of the food chain is beginning to rot out from under us. However, let this not insight fear as it does not mean the death of the individual, rather the death of the individual’s humanity. The individual will continue with biology that better suits their environment; they will evolve.

Furthermore, Cordeiro (2015) states: “Reality is not static because humans and the rest of nature are dynamic, and both are changing continuously.” I argue that this further elaborates upon the analysis made in the previous paragraph about the individual adapting to their environment. Although this individual would not be human; in acquiring the adaptations they deem necessary, they’ve stripped away their humanity and gave way to “the existence of two distinct types of being, the human and the posthuman” (Edwards, 2006). The latter of which being the individual of discussion, the posthuman. I argue that the existence of this posthuman being can lead to a social divide between those that possess the posthuman augmentations and those who do not.

Additionally, Edwards (2006) exclaims, “The human may be incapable of breeding with the posthuman and will be seen as having a much lower moral standing.” I contend with this examination of the relationship between the human and posthuman. I argue instead there are two outcomes wherein humans and posthumans can coexist. Outcome A which is stated by Edwards

in which the posthuman sees the human as inferior and therefore they receive a much lower social status. Or Outcome B, in which the posthuman still sees the human as inferior but instead decides to help those that want it. Most likely these posthumans would be cyborgs and elect to ‘upgrade’ these humans into cyborgs as well. “A cyborg would be a superintelligent being resulting from the combination of organic and cybernetic elements” (Vasquez, 2015). I submit that Vasquez’s definition of a cyborg is one that best suits that of a posthuman.

In contrast, I argue that the cybernetic augmentation of humans will lead to the destruction of humanity as we know it. However, that is ‘humanity as we know it’. Who is to say that life as a ‘posthuman’ would be any worse, if not better? Obviously, there is a reason for the existence of transhumanism and the desire to acquire these augmentations. It can be argued that this is merely evolution at work; one species adapts and overcome challenges they are faced with to better their quality of life and ability to survive in their ever-changing environment. Maybe we truly are getting to the point where it’s time for us to let go of our humanity and embrace this new way of being.

Ethical Perspective

Finally, there is the ethical perspective of transhumanism to consider. Many ethical and socioeconomic issues will arise as the result of transhumanism due mainly in part to the extraordinarily unequal distribution of wealth among humans. The most crucial being that which is described by Edwards (2006), "...transhumanism will increase inequalities between the rich and the poor. The rich can afford to make use of transhumanism, but the poor will not be able to". I concur with Edward's analysis and further proclaim that not only would this increase the rich's ability to control and manipulate many different aspects of the world but it would also in turn decrease the overall quality of human life for anyone not wealthy enough to afford such upgrades.

Additionally, transhumanism would lead to many great improvements in medical care, available only to those that can pay for it. This directly contends with the ethical perspective put forth by Renée Mirkes (2019): "Ensuring equal admission to any medical treatment refers to preserving the common good." One I argue to be agreed upon as universally good. So, if this perspective can be viewed as universally good, why will it not be employed? Unfortunately, this is due to the nature of humanity, "...people are inherently evil and selfish" (Hobbes, 1651, p. 17). I argue this inherent evil will not be negated by cybernetic augmentations. Until the final iota of humanity relinquished from the posthuman, they will continue to act out of selfishness, always striving for control as that is conceivably what humans desire most.

Furthermore, some seem to believe that this is not causality for the cessation of the development of transhuman technology. "Moreover, although it's a simple and boring point, it must be stressed that a technology leading to an increase in unjust inequalities is not a sufficient reason for discouraging the development and use of that technology;" (Bostrom, 2002). I contend

with this statement as it is greatly flawed and lacks the ability to coincide with the goal of developing technology for the common good. I claim this is the exact kind of thinking that will lead to the destruction of humanity. We can not allow for the suffering of many to aid the lives of the few! As a result of this type of thinking, in the transhuman era, humanity will be left in peril. Slowly being devoured by its inability to maintain its position as this planet's dominant species.

ACM Code of Ethics Analysis

In analyzing transhumanism, the concepts of “be honest and trustworthy” and “do no harm” are important to consider, in order to gain a deeper understanding (ACM, 2018). First, “be honest and trustworthy” is understood as being transparent and providing full disclosure of all pertinent system capabilities, limitations, and potential problems to the appropriate parties (ACM, 2018). I argue that this first concept is imperative to the safe development of transhuman technologies. Without transparency, it would be very easy for a developer to implement a malicious feature into one of their products. Imagine you have just purchased and installed your new bionic arm to help you lift more at work and it starts attacking you because of some malicious code that was hidden in it. Given, this is a hyperbole, but the case still holds.

Furthermore, I assert that without honesty and trust there would be no market for such items under the assumption that the majority of the population is intelligent and capable of self-preservation. Not only would this harm the companies selling these products, but more importantly it would mean a decrease in funding for the research and development of newer, better technologies. I argue that with the safe, transparent development of transhuman technologies, humanity could see a great leap forward in evolution. However, there exists

another exceedingly important factor that must also be considered if this evolutionary step is to be taken.

That which is critical to gaining a deeper understanding, being the concept of “no harm”. The concept of harm is generally understood as having negative consequences or impacts on someone or something (ACM, 2018). I argue that this is the single most important factor that must be obeyed at all costs. I propose the idea that if there is to be the development of universally accepted laws of transhumanism, this must be the first. Oftentimes pop-culture movies such as *The Terminator* depict the downfalls of transhumanism through exaggerated fiction. Though if this rule is not followed extensively, I argue it is possible that the depictions such as those seen in pop-culture may not be fiction for long.

Conclusion

Therefore, I conclude that if humanity is to evolve through transhumanism, it must be done with extreme caution and with safeguards put in place to protect against the technology being abused. Of course, that being much easier said than done. Moreover, I further conclude that with each new transhuman augmentation, the humanity of the user is being diluted. Eventually leading to the complete destruction of their humanity and their “rebirth” in a sense, as a posthuman being. While this technology is beneficial for those who have access to it, its overall impact on humanity as shown previously would be mostly negative. Though it is imperative that it be stated this is not an inherent result of such technology but rather a result of humanity’s desire for power and control.

This conclusion is significant because, we find the answer to the overarching question posed throughout this paper, “If we can develop transhuman technology, what becomes of humanity? Is it worth it?”. The answer being eventual destruction and a resounding “no” for now. Until humanity can learn to work toward the common good rather than for personal gain, we can not allow for the development of such technologies as it could destroy life as we know it and lead to exponentially more civil unrest and inequality. Lastly, I shall provide a quote that sums up transhumanism and its impact on the future of humanity into one concise statement regarding humanity’s relentless pursuit of forced evolution and its inevitable consequences: “Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether they could that they didn’t stop to think if they should” (Malcom, 1993, 36:08-36:13).

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