Ethics of a Transhumanist Society

by

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Introduction

In this paper, I argue how transhumanism and the augmentation of humans with technology will bring about greater accessibility to human rights and values across the general population, taking into account both the biomedical applications as well as the augmentation of the human body with technology over and under the skin. Taking a look at the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation and how it can be applied to the conversation surrounding bioethics as well as transhumanism and human augmentation. A fear of a transhuman world is being dehumanized or undermined based on the capacity of which one choses to become transhuman, if at all. Through the identification and understanding of human dignity and equality, as well as the active threats of a transhuman world, I seek to show the morality and ethics of transhumanism and how it will further human ability and capacity to thrive and expand as a race, Rather than draw us further from an ethically moral society.

Human Enhancement & Advancement

Humans inherently have flaws of many kinds, many of which though are physical that are present from the beginning of a persons life or that develop later on. As the fields of medicine and technology continue to advance in capability and decrease in invasiveness and size respectively, the more it becomes apparent that the two are destined to intertwine in order to help the greatest number of people with physical flaws. Blindness, hearing loss, lost or missing limbs, diseases like diabetes, cancer, the flu or even AIDS are seen as problems that the advancement of technology in the medical field can and will be the solution to. Nanotechnology works towards the future of sickness being eradicated from a persons system before they even realize they have it, and prosthetics that are equal to or even exceed the abilities of the body parts we are born with are coming closer to reality everyday. Even in modern technology is reaching to use cochlear implants to support the hearing and spoken language development in children(Lee, J). The integration of these technologies into the being of a person is seen as more than just a solution to a problem, but also as a progression to a post human era. A time past the worry of disabilities and disease, where humans no longer identify with the past limitations of the human body of only ever having one pair of eyes or legs in a lifetime or having the threat of terminal illness. This equality of ability and health provides the vessel for the human conscience to experience an existence dedicated to it’s own pursuit of happiness and self fulfillment, to live a transhuman life.

Human to Transhuman Identification

Human dignity

Human dignity is seen as being the uniqueness of the individual (Sandler) though the uniqueness of the individual human is inherent in the nature of the human body. Each has different fingerprints and footprints but moreso as all humans grow as we also develop unique mannerisms and rhythms to approaching and experiencing new and mundane experiences. Something as simple as the pattern in the timing of hitting keys on a keyboard can be traced back to a specific person given a large enough set of reference data. In Jotterand’s Argument Against Transhuman Dignity, Jotterand focuses on pointing out the futility of dignity in a transhumanist world, as technology is inherently nonunique and removes the “source” of human dignity. This thinking though I believe disregards the real source of human dignity even in the light of the definition provided.

The uniqueness of the human body itself may be lost in the future as a result of the augmentation of the human body or even the augmentation of the human form, but the human body is not what defines an individual in the modern era nor how it will be defined as augmentation works towards a better future for the average person. Individualism and uniqueness is found in the mind, in the solitude of a persons conscience and with the collection of self produced thoughts and ideas. A persons dignity is not the result of the way they look or their thumbprint but the result of the environment and society around them that mold their mind, values, and opinions into what it is at any given moment in time, as well as how they define themselves as opposed to others. Human dignity could only be lost if a conscience allowed itself to become part of another or changed through the use of technology, at that point, there is no longer an individual or a uniqueness to an individual human.

No matter the augmentation that happens to allow a person to pursue a transhuman life, so long as the conscience of the individual is left untouched, their “human” dignity is still very much a possibility and attainable as the true individual is not lost through such a procedure of becoming transhuman. The willing altering of a persons mind, though understandable in certain situations, would still have to be understood as the loss of their dignity. As a persons self image as well as their values and opinions could be changed as a result, taking away from that which made them the individual they are, forever leading them to live a life that is not identical to the person that they were, whether that be for the better or the worse.

Human equality

The “human essence” is sometimes seen as being the source of moral equality in human beings (Wilson), providing a level playing field for all to pursue their goals regardless of skin color, beauty or intelligence. Transhumanism is misunderstood to threaten this bases of equality between human beings. The enhancement of the human body I feel is misunderstood to be an enhancement on the persons value rather than on a persons ability or health, that somehow the ability to enhance persons skills, intelligence or even emotionally stability makes them morally above un-enhanced beings.

A possible way to avoid the inequality of humans and transhumans would be to limit the extent of how much a person can be augmented. Possibly leaving the capabilities of prosthetics and medical augmentations to the equivalent of their human counterparts, wholly cutting out the possibility of augmenting past the current limitations of the human body. While such technology would be incredible to the modern world I feel is still doesn’t reach far enough, to stop at our own limitations would be similar to if we never created plains or cars and accepted the speed at which we could run and our inability to fly.

If not to limit the extent of augmentation then to prevent the inequality of humans and transhumans you can obtain a better understanding of equality in general. The equality of humans is found in the understanding of each human's dignity, in that we understand that for each human life there is a human mind with individual thoughts and understanding of self. This idea of equality is broad but absolute, and though is initially developed as an idea in all young people as we learn of others existence of a conscience and emotions but is often blurred by cultural or societal norms. America has been guilty since it’s begining of instilling the ideas of racism and privilege in all its citizens and has only recently seen this type of understanding of human equality in some of the population.

With a better understanding of human dignity and human equality, it implies the equality of transhumans to humans. Keeping at it’s core that the pure human mind is what gives a person its rights to equality, and nothing more. This solution also gives an absolute understanding of the value of a human life as it is unquivering to a persons race, ethnicity, or religion. As each person grows to be the individual that they are, they hold onto their memories and thoughts to keep an identity of themselves, and this identity no matter how different or similar it is to others provides the only reasoning needed to see another person as an equal no matter the race, religion, or augmentation.

Transhuman Values

As man makes the transition to the possibility of a fully transhuman existence for individuals, the true values of society will be questioned. Values are described as “those things [an individual] deem worth living, working, or even suffering or dying for.”(Have) in the UNESCO Universal Declaration On Bioethics and Human Rights, or somewhat more specifically something that “if and only if you would want to want it if you were perfectly acquainted with it and were thinking and deliberating as clearly as possible”(Bostrom). In a transhuman society the general values would be similar to that of today but balanced differently. Values such as privacy, likeness, freedom of speech, and protection of original creations become linearly important with the progression of molding technology into our lives and our bodies with technology.

Just as we have seen in the past decades, new technology beckons that the individual gives up the privacy of their being in the form of personal information or likeness to use technological features (Tavani). As previously discussed the individualism or as it can also be understood, the likeness of a person is an aspect to the dignity of a human being, dignity being what gives each person equality as well as a sense of self. As more of the individual is put onto a network the more the protection and privacy of information exclusive to themselves is valued, there becomes less and less that is protected from possible threats of intrusion by others.

The progression of the average life online also must imply the protection of the freedom of speech as well as the copyrights that belong to persons in cyberspace. Just as the information private to a person becomes more important to the likeness and dignity of a person, so does the protection of original thoughts and creations expressed in cyberspace. The vacuum of proper rights to an individual online threatens the dignity of all persons as not only their work could be stolen and profited from but part of their dignity could be taken from them if another choses to also forfeit their own dignity to steal the identity of another.

The emphasis on these values results not just from the influence of technology but also as a result of the transhuman movement, because these values also embed themselves at the base of keeping consistent understanding of self. These values are common values of humans, and they are vital to the infrastructure of the human race shall we want to continue striving towards a future that embraces the use of technology to help not just those that are in need but also to improve the limitations set by our bodies, whether they be flaws or not.

Conclusion

Humans inherently have flaws, humans become damaged, and though much of that is not physical, prosthetics and technology have a clear path in helping all be able bodied regardless of past experiences. The help that these technologies offer come with the possibilities of advancing and enhancing the human body past it’s natural abilities, and though what was thought to be possible of a human being in the past, does not change the conscience that is developed in all of us. Each person has and develops a self, and though traditional identification of a person may be blurred in the pursuit of transhumanism, through an understanding of human dignity as the private thoughts and values, as well as the likeness of a person, human dignity will not be lost. With this understanding of human dignity a source for human equality can be drawn, in seeing that we each possess a self image as well as uniqueness in our thought process and values, we can see that the equality of man is not a result of race or religion or heritage as past cultures and societies would like to believe. This understanding of equality provides the basis of ethics surrounding transhumanism as the embodiment of a person begins to change with the development of transhuman technologies. Though the augmentations that transhumanism provides for the human body, as both aid and enhancement, this idea of dignity and equality becomes even more important as the values of a transhuman society begin to focus more on the self and what makes up an individual more than it ever had before. Transhumanism itself is controversial, and sometimes frightening, but with these understandings of human dignity, equality, while keeping in view the important values for a transhumanist society, I believe it is possible for humanity to take steps towards a transhuman society and allow our species to flourish like it never has before.

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