

Transhumanism: The Epitome of Doom and Gloom

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Abstract

Ever since the idea of "Transhumanism" came into being, it has divided our society into two opposing factions i.e. the bioconservatives and transhumanists. The transhumanist movement is based on the idea that enhancements should be made in humans through technology while bioconservatives oppose this idea. Transhumanism is already feared to be world's most dangerous idea by bioconservatives such as Francis Fukuyama, as it is not justified or proven yet that transhumanism is safe for our future. The notion is believed to be not only de-humanising but also poses many threats to the rest of humanity. As explicitly suggested by bioconservatives human enhancing technologies are more of a bane than a boon. Furthermore, many of the transhumanist technologies have many demerits to them. Bioconservatives believe that the technological enhancements will lead to obscenity and be a blemish on the human race. It is highly possible that humans will suffer from autocracy by the hands of the posthumans, since the posthuman age will certainly give rise to several moral dilemmas, such as racism, which will plague the human world. There are four fundamental aspects of transhumanism; nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology (IT) and cognitive sciences, which come with many promising advantages, but can also turn our future into a dystopia. Even with constant opposition from the bioconservatives, the dark scenarios related with the ascend of the transhuman era are inevitable and the amalgamation of machines with man is equivalent to forfeiting true humanity.

Keywords: Technology, nanotechnology, biotechnology, cognitive science, ethics.

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Introduction

Throughout the course of history, there have been periods when mankind reached many milestones in terms of advancement, and then there have been others, where chances of advancement were slim to nothing. With the dawn of the new age, the 3rd millennium, much sooner than we anticipate, the world, as we now know it, might un-

dergo grisly transitions. Transhumanism is a worldwide, cultural and intellectual movement which advocates transformation of the human condition, by utilising and improving technologies that would greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities¹. The main objective of this report is to present the dangers of transhumanism that will always vanquish the possible benefits of transhumanism. Therefore, the approaches of transhumanists are met with scepticism.

Transhumanism vs. Bioconservatism

As advancement in technology is improving its pace, it is deriving people to stand up next to either of the two dominant groups, the bioconservatives and the transhumanists². While transhumanists advocate transhumanism, the latter believes that technological innovation threatens the natural order of

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the world, and that transhumanism is leading us to a posthuman era, which is the end of humanity³. The transhumanist may contemplate the bioconservatives as the conservative group, as the suffix might suggest; on the contrary bioconservatives dread that transhumanism will eliminate the fine line between biological and non-biological, engendering the production of scientifically modified, intelligent and immortal individuals or part-human, part-machine, too modified to be categorised under the term "human". This movement to violate human limits will put an end to human evolution and start a new form of evolution all together; the cybernetic evolution. Transhumanism would indeed bring advanced technologies at every person's door steps; this is bound to give rise to many dilemmas. As anyone would be making some sort of super virus in their garage lab, such dangers are inevitable. Transhumanists are also opting to tamper with genomes, to enhance a human's cognitive abilities and stronger and healthier bodies. Critics think that this is immoral because it would blur the line between the natural and the artificial⁴. They also believe that merely the rich would get to have all the high-tech equipment, and all the power would be consumed by them, that would cause despair amongst the poor. Critics also believe that this astonishing technological development would also bring chaos to the law and order globally and would surely wreak havoc on democracy, and would therefore make our world dystopian⁴. Transhumanists believe that they would discover a way to form brain net which is, according to them a possible successor to the internet; it is a system of virtual telepathy that would allow people to create art and music, socialise with other people. They would be able to visit places, even if they are not physically there, and would have the opportunity to upload their virtual experience online on the cloud like utilities⁵. This would indeed lead us all towards fractured reality; we would be detached from the real world, we may completely wall ourselves from each other.

Transhumanism and Catastrophic Face of NBIC

The four fundamentals that serve a pivotal role in transhumanism which is summed up in the abbreviation NBIC: Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology (IT) and Cognitive Science are considered as the force which is driving the future⁶. Nanotechnology which is a technology related to features of nanometre scale (one billionth of a meter), including thin films, fine particles, chemically synthesised products, advanced microlithography, and so forth⁷. Biotechnology encompasses the application of science and engineering to the direct and indirect use of living organisms, or parts or products of them, in their natural or modified forms⁸. IT is the applied computer systems, both hardware and software, including networking and telecommunications⁹. Lastly, cognitive science is the study of intelligence and intelligent systems, particularly intelligent behaviour as computation⁸.

Nanotechnology is one of the emerging fields of transhumanism. Even though it sounds promising but it also appears far-fetched. The plans for nanotechnology are too ambitious. There is no proof that these nanobots, once inside the human body, will not start replicating themselves. We have very little control over a disease once it starts spreading even with the availability of highly advanced equipment; how will we stop these nanobots from replicating? This could turn one of bioconservatives greatest fears, the grey goo scenario, into reality¹⁰. Nanobots being micro in size, they can easily be absorbed in the organs and the magnetic components can cause damage to the tissues or to the DNA disrupting the entire human physiology.

Another far-fetched aspect of transhumanism is mind uploading. This will require transferring of human mind to a computer. The person's entire consciousness will exist as software in a computer. Consciousness is what allows a person to be aware or to feel emotions; with mind uploading the person will lack consciousness¹⁰. The body would exist as an empty vessel to be controlled by software. This will erase the line where human can be

differentiated from a robot¹¹. A person unable to think and feel on its own will be an artificial man.

Though, with the posthuman era comes a bunch of noble aspects that people can use to their advantages like prosthetic or bionic organs for those who have either lost them or do not have the organic organs¹⁰. Also, in the near future, it may be possible to edit and delete human memories. If you perceive that it is too fictitious or too good to be true, then you need to think again, because MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA) scientists have implanted memory in to the brain of mice. They have also isolated an individual's memory and forced it into the brain of mice and induced recall of that memory by manipulating neurons¹². This could be an optimistic treatment for dementia, post-treatment stress disorder, Alzheimer's disease, and other neurological disorders.

Are some of us already Transhumans?

In a way some of us are already transhumans. We have already established symbiotic relationship with technology, since transhumanism is a phenomenon where technology becomes an extension of ourselves. Likewise, we use smart phones; we upload our thoughts, emotions, daily events, on our phones and stay connected with the world via social media. Bionic eye transplants have already been carved out on the blind, to give them sight¹³. More than 300,000 people have cochlear implants, which enables them to hear¹⁴. Many people are already using prosthetic limbs and arms that work on human thoughts via the placement of a chip, in the brain. These limbs are far more flexible, and powerful, than the organic limbs¹⁵. Smart pills powered by the body, have also been invented. Its job is to monitor vitals of the patient's body and report it to his or her doctor¹⁴.

Cybernetics

Cybernetics, which would replace the original organs of human body into a cyborg, would be more flexible and powerful. This would help in mak-

ing mechanical kidneys, liver, heart, etcetera¹⁶. This would be transplanted into the individual who lacks a fully functional one. But for those who want to replace their perfectly functional limbs or parts with robotic ones, it's simply chaotic and unnatural. Also, cyborgs would pose a danger to the society. It is human nature that we are never satisfied with our physical appearance, and we would always want an upgrade for these mechanical organs, just like we constantly want to upgrade our phones, and because of that we will become slaves of technology and of corporations that own these upgradable facilities. Artificial intelligence is just a consciousness trap; we do not even need such kind of technology taking over our mind. Longevity or immortality, promised by transhumanist, does look great from an individual perspective but it will be a plague from a national and global angle¹⁷. Suppose that even if it is achieved, which is highly impossible, we would face two outcomes, increased amount of population that our planet cannot even handle, and increased GDP (gross domestic product) and high consumption, resulting in utter restlessness.

Radio Frequency Identification Chips

Let's not forget about the RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) chips¹⁸. Volunteering for them is like giving up your freedom, as the human mind can easily be controlled by these chips. We could say that it is our curiosity that leads us to stand where we are in the current stage of evolution, the main aim was to understand the world better, now even after stepping into the third millennium the questions we began with still remain unanswered. Transhumanists predict that the posthuman stage could unveil the secrets of the universe or it could be their way to persuade us to step into the next era of advancement. What transhumanist are overlooking is how much from this movement do we really need and how much we want. The biological intelligence has so far been sufficient enough to reach milestones in every field, then why take non-biological intelligence to a level where it will become dominant to its predecessor¹⁹.

Grey Goo Scenario

The concept of 'Nanobots' is perhaps the most novel idea that transhumanism has gifted us with. But this too seems far-fetched because we do not even understand the complexity of the human body, so how can we be sure that instead of curing cancer, nanobots could even transform the cancer/tumour into an even more lethal form. The incident which took place in Germany, in the year 2006, by the use of a product 'Magic Nano' that caused hundreds of citizens to fall ill, can be presented as a base for this idea²⁰. Another possibility is that nanobots could start replicating uncontrollably forming a grey goo²¹. The construction of a self-replicating nanomachine, which can evidently be lethal or hazardous, should be prohibited²².

Conclusion

Transhumanists offer the idea that the choice to go under enhancements will solely be granted to the individual itself. However, history presents itself as a proof that human race cannot be trusted with power; cruelty is a gift we have given to us ourselves. With enhancements, we may consider ourselves to be better or somewhat elite than the rest; this is where every science-fiction movie we have ever seen will be a living reality. Even though transhumanists argue that all will be equal under the law, the ones to undergo enhancements and the ones which will not opt for this option, but the better of us has and will always be dominant, which will ultimately lead to what Darwin presented as the struggle for existence, leading to the elimination of present age of humanity.

Immorality of neuroscience and cognitive-based approaches are yet to be discovered in humans i.e. inserting chips, tampering with genes and incorporating machines into ourselves is not only dangerous but unnatural. Though there may be some advantages of transhumanism, but its disadvantages outweigh them, because there is a likelihood of unforeseen consequences.

Conflict of Interest

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