



The Limit of Limitlessness: A Philosophical Evaluation of Transhumanism and Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study is on the limits and boundaries of transhumanism and bioethical enhancement. It creates awareness and justifies the honest call to the achievements of this technology and know when and where to draw the line, while applying common sense and other factors that may aid good judgement.

Objectives: This study seeks to x-ray the extremes imbedded in the new bioethical technology and enhancement techniques. It calls for optimum consciousness and alertness while making decision on the usage of the technology and potentially drawing limits when considering effects of long term usage by a considerable number of people for the society.

Method: The method of critical hermeneutics was used for this study.

Result: This study successfully exposes the dangers and consequences of unbridled bioethical enhancement race and the clarion call to consciousness in bioethical matters and decision making, as it affects the society at large.

Conclusion: Transhumanism and enhancement in all its variants pertains to life within the larger society and so is not a unique isolation, but rather a collective whole, therefore should be treated as such.

Key Recommendation: It recommends a practice of bio-ethics based on the interest of the larger society on holistic integral human values.

Key words: Afro-Bioethics, Biotechnology, Enhancement, Evolution, Transhumanism.



INTRODUCTION

We live in an enhancement society. The tendency today is to embrace bioengineering and biotechnology for health reasons otherwise giving couples and single reproducers more choices about their children's genetic characteristics (Sandel, 2011). It started at the transhumanist era but championed today by Oxford University based Uehiro Professor of practical ethics, an Australian philosopher and bioethicist famous for his Principle of Procreative Beneficence, Julian Savulescu. He is a prime protagonist among the vast pool of prominent scholars in this area of philosophy that deals with bioethical advancements and new technology. Julian Savulescu's principle of procreative beneficence argues that parents have a moral obligation to select the child, of possible future children, who is expected to have the best life, based on available genetic information. This concept is deeply rooted in Western bioethical traditions, emphasizing individual autonomy and rational decision-making.

Some earlier transhumanists who laid the foundation for Savulescu to build on are FM-2030 (Fereidoun M. Esfandiary), Derek Anton Parfit, Anders Sandberg, Nick Bostrom, David Pearce. They all propagate transhumanism as a philosophy that believes humanity can, and should, strive to higher levels, both physically, mentally, and socially, as a movement. As a field of study, transhumanism encourages research into life extensions, cryonics, nanotechnology, physical and mental enhancements, uploading human consciousness into computers, and mega-scale engineering, to say the least. Hence, it is now possible for intellectual and social institutions to supplant evolution in refining and improving species, while some transhumanists assume the continuation of evolution through technology rather than through society (Hays, 2018), culture and religion put together.

ORIGIN OF TRANSHUMANISM

The origin of the term transhumanism dates to an essay written by Julian Huxley in 1957, titled *Transhumanism*. Julian Huxley, who in 1957 coined and used the word transhumanism for the first time ever used it principally to describe the act of improving the human condition through social and cultural changes, stating clearly that humanity had naturally evolved. Hence, nature is prior and superior to nurture. This must be taken into account as science wields its power through nurture. A professor of futurology called FM-2030 in about 1960 introduced the contemporary meaning of transhumanism. While teaching the new human concepts, FM 2030 began to identify people who are adopting technologies, lifestyles, and worldviews transitional to posthumanity as transhuman. The British philosopher Max More, following this hypothesis, laid the intellectual foundation and groundwork. He articulated "the principle of transhumanism as a futurist philosophy" in 1990 (Bionics, 2014). Transhumanism in general aims at the overthrow of humanism by posting us to the transhuman level. This is in consonance with Alvin Toffler's proposition of nurture taking over nature in his work *Future Shock*. Pierre Teilhard De Chardin amongst other philosopher makes this more vivid in his work *The Phenomena of Man*. To attempt a possible resolution of this philosophical impasse it is important return to the first ever use and definition of the word transhumanism as seen in the different variations of enhancement, where genetic enhancement according to Pavlovic refers to introducing the changes into a genome or epigenome intended to modify and improve nonpathological human traits (Pavlovic, 2018).



WHAT IS WRONG WITH EVOLUTION: TRANSHUMANISM AND EXTREME ENHANCEMENT

Evolution has been at the task of genetic selection and self-enhancement for nearly a billion years. Scientists are recombining DNA for well over three decades now. In evolution, there is destiny or what some call divine intention. Its most recent product *Homo sapiens* needs to decide if the better gift to the future is manipulating the genome or letting nature take its course for a while longer, while we watch and learn. Our humanity is not under threat by science. It is scrutinised due to a mistaken idea of what science can bring or teach us. The danger is not science but scientism. By scientism, we understand a kind of world picture that assumes that science by itself can explain everything. Scientism is a wrong attitude that treats science as God or as if it had the final say (Sandel, 2016). It is dangerous, failing to realize that science does not have all the answers. Restricting, taming, and checking her excesses is imperative. Nothing should usurp the place of God, Nature, or other central entities just for science. We do not deny the prime place given to science in the world of today. However, everything must be put in their proper perspective. What is our obligation (if any) to humanity, the human race comprising of the persons who have not yet come and those who may not even come into existence? Some people believe that we can wrong those we leave out of existence altogether (merely possible persons). Does the biblical directive 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth' (Genesis 1:28) still hold up to closer scrutiny.

Julian Savulescu demonstrates that by employing *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) and preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), eugenic selection of embryos is now possible (2001). Usually, PGD is used for the purposes of detecting inherited genetic abnormalities, chromosomal abnormalities etc. Theoretically, it can also be used to test genetic traits, for example eye and hair colour etc. Much success has been recorded in the area of genetic research. Making deep in-roads into the genetic basis of complex traits like intelligence. a gene identified for criminal behaviour was discovered in an instance (Savulescu, 2001). Through IVF and PGD couples and single reproducers may also use this technology to select for non-medical traits or even for less serious medical traits like a lower risk of developing Alzheimer Disease. It is on record that PGD has already been used to select embryos of a desired gender where history shows the absence of any sex-linked genetic disease.

Given this thought process Julian Savulescu among other scholars therefore argue that: “some non-disease genes affect the likelihood of us leading the best life; we have a reason to use information which is available about such genes in our reproductive decision-making; couples should select embryos or fetuses which are most likely to have the best life, based on available genetic information, including information about non-disease genes. I will also argue that we should allow selection for non-disease genes even if this maintains or increases social inequality. I will focus on genes for intelligence and sex selection. I will defend a principle which I call Procreative Beneficence: couples (or single reproducers) should select the child, of the possible children they



could have, who is expected to have the best life, or at least as good a life as the others, based on the relevant, available information” (Savulescu, 2001).

Such scholars as mentioned above think the time is here for humans to shape their destiny and redirect the course of evolution. Genetic enhancement technology is one of the most powerful tools for achieving this. It is inevitable since the future is for humans to reshape. We live in a constantly dynamic world of permanent change; historically characterised by cultural revolutions, as evidenced in language development, political organisations, agriculture, physical technologies, and biotechnology. These have shaped the human society and species (Lederberg, 1963).

The principles of transhumanism and enhancement are in line with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin ordinarily thinks that humans did not evolve with a particular pattern or design (Darwin, 1859). Hence, the need to reconstruct, restructure and redesign humankind. Behind this construct called the human being is a prominent presence of a significant moral limitations. Humans can be either a peaceful or a violent species, so to speak. Statistics show that one per cent of the human population are psychopaths, yet they are responsible for fifty per cent of the violent crimes committed worldwide. Therefore, according to these statistics, if one per cent of the human population are psychopaths, then there are seventy million psychopaths globally, not to mention ideologues and fanatics (Savulescu, 2016).

We do not live anywhere near the thick rain forests with sticks and stones today, rather, we live in a radically and technologically advanced world today. Hence, Savulescu insists that enough *plutonium* floating around in the former Soviet Union can build twenty thousand atomic bombs (Savulescu, 2014). Just as Richard Posner puts it, "there may be enough plutonium outside secure military installations to furnish the raw material for 20,000 atomic bombs" (Savulescu, 2012). Analysing the recent data on pollution, homicide, poverty, , war and more, psychologist Steven Pinker insists that the humankind is doing better today in each of these areas when compared with 30 years ago. He therefore argues that the world is safer now than it has ever been and that the rate of homicides has reduced and is still reducing even more (Pinker, 2018).

For Savulescu, the risks we pose to ourselves are ever increasing through our enormous advanced technology. Is this not contradictory. One has the impression that our globalised world is a place that the human animal has not evolved to flourish in. Julian Savulescu identifies a more common problem namely, violence, in the area of enhancement and reproduction. Charles Darwin famously and brilliantly argues that humans are not designed for any particular purpose; instead, humans are designed as products of blind evolution (Darwin, 1859). There are enough reasons to differ from this opinion. We are not all saints. One does not need to be a mathematician to calculate the level of actual and potential risks facing our world now, more so in the immediate future. It shows the world's threat namely, what we will be facing for its future survival. We are all limited in various ways. Our failure to reach consensus and enforce them on climate change, the area of global poverty and inequality, or advanced reproductive technology is no longer news. Despite the inroads in enhancements through science and technology, we are still imperfect and cannot solve all these problems.



What about the invention of biological weapons? It will be possible to manufacture smallpox in a small-scale laboratory in a garage or backyard and disseminate that worldwide, killing people in their hundreds of millions. This calls to question the not-yet substantiated doubt and enquiry about the origin of the Covid-19 virus today. Therefore, it only takes one out of the seventy million psychopaths, fanatics, ideologues or even one out of the seven billion people of the world population to do this kind of significant harm to our world, and tens of thousands of other people will have this capacity (Savulescu, 2016).

BOUNDARIES OF LIMITATION

Human beings lived in comparatively small and close-knit societies with maybe some primitive technology that only affects their immediate environment, for most of their history. Their moral psychology is adapted to make them fit to live in these conditions. Today, it might be considered myopic and restricted to concern oneself only about kin and people in the neighbourhood and in the immediate future. Although these living conditions have radically changed through science and technology, the moral psychology behind it has remained fundamentally the same through these changes occurring with accelerating speed. Advanced scientific technology has equipped human beings with nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction. States and terrorists use them in wars over dwindling natural resources or other disagreements. Example is the USA vs Iraq, China vs Hong Kong, China vs Taiwan, the USA vs Afghanistan, Russia vs Georgia, the USA vs North Korea, Russia vs Crimea, Turkey vs Syria, Russia vs Ukraine, Palestine vs Israel etc.

Liberal democracies cannot overcome these threats merely by developing novel technologies. We need the enhancement of the citizenry's moral dispositions, in other words, an extension of their moral concern beyond a small circle of personal acquaintances and further into the future; otherwise, human civilisation is jeopardised. It is doubtful whether moral enhancement is solely accomplished using traditional moral education; nevertheless, it should never be neglected. Therefore, we should also explore the prospects of moral enhancement not only through cultural and religious means but now also through alternative biomedical means, within strictly guided set of rules. Whilst discussing "*The Ethical Use of Biotechnology: Debating the Science of Perfecting Humans*", Michael Sandel insists humans have a moral obligation towards other human beings. A cross-board of philosophers and critical minds generally agree there should be ethical limitations in the way humans treat humans and maybe other animals too. There is a vast dichotomy between genetic technology and bioengineering that promote and advance human health (cure, repair injuries, stem cell research and combat diseases). The use of genetic technology and bioengineering for non-medical enhancement raises many questions (Sandel, 2009).

There is a need to distinguish between genetic engineering technologies used to promote health, cure, and repair injuries in animals and humans. An example in this regard is stem cell research. It uses new genetic discoveries and technology to combat diseases, while advancing human health, among other goals. The use of these genetic technologies not for medical purposes but rather for non-medical enhancements raises many questions. An instance of the misuse is couples' use of this technology to decide whether to have a baby boy or a baby girl, or whether their child should have blue or brown eyes, white or red hair etc. Today, people use this technology to select not only the sex but also other attributes of their children.



This technology is already operational today and made possible by the one in a lifetime scientific breakthrough called PGD, sperm sorting and embryo screening to almost a hundred per cent certainty. This touches not only on the individual choices humans make but also on a broader perspective; it calls to question the notion of freedom and free will. To what extent can this topic of freedom and freewill be stretched. Human desire is insatiable. It is not only about choosing the sex of the child, but also about more and more people desiring the use of the new genetic engineering technique and technology to enhance human beings further: height, physical strength, athletic ability, intelligence, hair colour, eye colour, music ability, and hormone deficient children (short children) etc. We must grapple with the question of approving the use of these drugs (human growth hormones) for (purported) enhancements, as well as having good enough reasons why they may or not be administered.

It begs the question why should we make genetic technology available to couples and single reproducers who intend to manipulate or instead select the genetic traits of their children for enhancement? They claim this will improve their well-being and make their lives better, more successful, helping them compete more effectively in a highly and intensely competitive modern world. Enhancement in the sense of Julian Savulescu allows humans to be more beautiful, handsome, taller, and intelligent. In the historical, cultural, religious, moral and ethical trails of the integrative purview, there is only so much between being human and being divine. This kind of use or misuse of genetic technology makes the mind uneasy and morally troubling. An average person may naturally shrink from the idea of technologically (genetically) empowered designer parents, more so designer babies. Hence, the average unassuming person or society may not be in a hurry to accept and or integrate this new wave into our milieu of morally acceptable science and technology just yet.

AFRO-BIOETHICS AND ENHANCEMENT TECHNOLOGY

An Afrocentric critique of the entire enhancement project in general and the procreative beneficence principle in particular would approach from a perspective that values communal well-being, holistic understanding of health, and the socio-historical context of marginalized communities. This discourse in Afro-Bioethics is not only engaging but also perennial. The ethical reality in different parts of the world is dynamic and not rigid. This work points out the possible problems that may be encountered while considering the extent of bioethical enhancement within an Afrocentric context.

The Afrocentric consideration on the subject of extreme enhancement demonstrates based on the Afrocentric world-view, culture and religion, the interconnectedness in all things, buttressing why excess is risky; why science deserves a prime place but not to usurp Religion, Culture, Nature or God. These are important for the Afrocentric mindset. “What this suggests is that children are shaped not by their parents over the long run, but in part, only in part, by their genes, in part by their culture, the culture of the country at large and the children’s own culture, namely their peer group and to a very large extent, larger than most people are prepared to acknowledge by chance, chance events in the wiring of the brain in utero, chance events as you live your life” (Pinker,



2003). Let us consider the thoughts of Julian Savulescu a bioethicist who claims that “some non-disease genes affect the likelihood of humans leading the best life” (Savulescu, 2001). At face value, this claim sounds plausible. The pertinent and initial irritation is best explained in the question who and how do we determine or define what the ‘best-life’ is for all. Is our sense of value and judgement no longer differentiated? The tendency to use the information that is available about such genes in our reproductive decision-making may not be alien to the African-think world. The African worldview pay attention to distinguish and draw the boundaries for Religion, Nature, God and Science. Each recognize its autonomy, keep to its boundaries and still work together. Therefore, couples and single reproducers selection for non-disease genes such as intelligence and sex selection, which may either maintain or increase social inequality and the selection for embryos or fetuses which are most likely to have the best-life’, based on available genetic information (including information about non-disease genes) may be Science trespassing into the domain of Culture, Faith (God) or Nature.

Afrocentric thought emphasizes the importance of community and collective well-being over individualistic choices. Savulescu’s principle of procreative beneficence prioritizes individual parents’ decisions and the potential future benefits for their child. This perspective can be seen as neglecting the broader implications for the community and society at large. In many African cultures, child-rearing is viewed as a communal effort, and decisions regarding children are made with consideration of the community’s well-being. Therefore, the Afrocentric view would argue that decisions around procreation should also account for the potential impact on the community, not just the individual child.

Moreover, the Afrocentric perspective values a holistic understanding of health and well-being, which includes physical, mental, spiritual, and communal health. Savulescu’s approach tends to focus on genetic and physical attributes that might lead to a ‘better’ life, potentially overlooking other crucial aspects of a person's well-being. For instance, a child’s cultural and spiritual environment, their sense of identity, and their community’s support systems are all integral to their overall well-being. From an Afrocentric standpoint, procreative decisions should consider these dimensions, ensuring that children are not just physically healthy but also spiritually and culturally enriched.

Additionally, an Afrocentric critique would highlight the historical and socio-political context that affects African and African-descended populations. The legacy of colonialism, slavery, and systemic racism has profoundly impacted these communities, influencing their health outcomes and access to resources. Savulescu’s principle may inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities by promoting genetic selection practices that could favor traits perceived as advantageous in a Western context, potentially marginalizing traits valued in other cultures. This could lead to a form of new eugenics, perpetuating historical injustices.

Furthermore, the principle of procreative beneficence assumes access to advanced genetic technologies and healthcare, which may not be readily available to many communities, especially in the global South. This disparity raises ethical concerns about fairness and equity. An Afrocentric critique would argue for a more equitable distribution of healthcare resources and the inclusion of marginalized voices in bioethical discussions to ensure that procreative choices do not exacerbate existing inequalities.



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For religious people, human beings are made in the image of a divine God. Much later, some scientists and scholars began to opine that man is a product of natural selection. Nowadays, they say that man is a set of bundles of selfish genes shaped by selection (Dawkins, 1976). The human being is viewed as the self-transforming beings: beings intent on and capable of refashioning themselves in the image of what they think they should be (Stableford, 1984). This worldview proposes that there should ultimately be no restrictions (morally, socially, financially, epistemically, and biologically) on anything possible.

On the humanization of enhancement in general and Julian Savulescu's procreative beneficence principle in particular within a cultural, religious, moral and ethical valuation context x-rays the importance of the parent-child relationship, which ordinarily may be downplayed. From an Afrocentric integrative perspective, it is unique and essential that good parents are ready to accept their children the way they come. 'African parents' do not design or choose their children. Parents exercise their right of choice only while choosing their friends and spouses based on the qualities they like or find attractive in them, but not later. This right to choose does not apply to their choice of children, since they do not design them. Children are received already uniquely designed. One should accept them the way God gives them to us. This fact teaches us something vital in life, namely, docility and humility in the face of what is given. Generally, this may be the disposition of the majority, other dissenting voices notwithstanding.

The docility and humility principle prepares one for the highly priced quality of unconditional love experienced between parents and their children as evidenced in the normal families and society. It teaches parents to be open to the given or the unbidden: a quality highly prized in a society greatly polarized, bereft and torn apart by lack of morality or the apparent shrinking of the moral status of the society (Sandel, 2009). This attribute is vital in and for every mind. Since it is rare to come by in our world today, any society that possess this quality may stand tall as the moral authority of the world on this matter.

FUTURE OF THE PRESENT ENHANCEMENT TECHNOLOGY

Transhumanism represents the vision of a future where humans can transcend their biological constraints and achieve new heights of flourishing through the application of advanced technologies. Over the last decade, we have seen scientists and scientific community advocate for growing babies outside of the womb in an artificial pod facility to make it easier to weed out genetic abnormalities and edit the human genome in real time. Scientist advocate for transbirth (whole body gestational donation) to make sure biological men have the same opportunity to give birth like biological women, even if that means implanting embryos into livers



of men to grow babies (Smajdor, 2023). Biotechnology today startups pretend humans do not need women to grow babies anymore because they can just create new eggs cells out of stem cells in laboratories. “In our lab, we reconstitute the process under which egg cells would normally develop inside the female body. We generate induced pluripotent stem cells from blood samples. We then shepherd these stem cells through the various steps that they would normally undergo as they develop to become viable eggs” (Conception, 2023). We are seeing the end or the removal of all human involvements in procreation because scientists are creating near human/humanlike embryos entirely from stem cells: no egg, no sperm, no womb, no placenta (Guardian, 2023). The more playing God shift in the scientific world of biotechnology and development continues, the more absolutely terrifying it becomes that not enough persons are speaking up. Scientists are literally erasing the role of humans in the society right before our very eyes and we are applauding it, calling it progress.

The final goal of enhancement may be to modify, adulterate or eradicate humanity, as we know it. Once we understand the final destination, it becomes much easier to look back and identify the psychological conditioning, the biological tampering, the cultural grooming and the educational prepping that we have been subjected to for decades, in preparation for making us accept a post-human future. It takes a lot of physical and psychological abuse to get an intelligent species like ours to agree to its own extinction. Most, if not all that has transpired in the last years was designed to get us closer to accepting such a dystopian reality. Whether you care to accept it or not, we live in a hyper-controlled Matrix, where our perception of reality is meticulously planned, managed and executed in order to control and steer us in whichever direction they wish and the direction is a post-human world. For this, they first needed to destabilize, dehumanize and demoralize humanity through every means possible.

The destruction of the natural and nuclear family, indoctrination of children by the state, killing of unwanted babies and abortion, the eradication of God and spirituality from schools and education, life in dream and megacities away from nature, toxic and fast foods, polluted air and water, internet and social media at the centre of everything, replacing real human relationships, connection and interactions, engineered or artificial financial crisis and taxation, staged and endless wars and massive migration, stress, anxiety, depression, drugs and alcohol, constant fear-mongering, moral relativism as the new religion and state engineered public health pandemic are characteristics of today’s world. Humanity has been influenced and forced to move away from all the things that give it strength, security, purpose and meaning. A weak, immoral, disconnected, ignorant and unhealthy population is an easy target for the next stage: the creation of an entire generation of androgynous beings. Masculinity is under attack psychologically, culturally and biologically. Men pretending to be women are replacing women in sports, entertainment and politics, doping and inhalation of substances seem to be the order of the day. Moreover, children are being indoctrinated at school to think that gender is a choice while parents are encouraged or rather enticed to choosing the traits and gender of their children.

The transhumanism movement does not seem to be a grassroots movement anymore, as it previously was. Today, it appears to come from the top. It may no longer be based on people’s freedom of expression, sexuality or civil rights, but rather on a thwarted adulterated one-sided transgender motive. These are psychological operations with clear agenda, getting mankind closer



to transhumanism by making him question the most fundamental notion of human identity: his gender. If one does not know who he is, if one already identifies as a hybrid between a man and a woman, he will be easily convinced to become a hybrid between human and machine. Gender ideology is the two plus two equals five from George Orwell's 1984 dystopian novel (1949). It is the final test to see whether mankind will follow the most absurd party line towards our own extinction. Nevertheless, two plus two equals four, and no matter how one chooses to dress, call oneself or change ones physique, traits or characteristics will not change that. The sad reality though is that in the gas lighting process to get us closer to a post-human future, they have mentally and physically harmed an increasing number of children, young people and parents and it is only getting worse. This must be controlled or properly managed if it should not be out rightly stopped.

CONCLUSION

An Afrocentric critique of transhumanism and enhancement challenges its individualistic and genetic-focused approach. This study advocates for a more holistic, community-centered, and equitable perspective on procreative decision-making. This critique underscores the importance of considering cultural, spiritual, and socio-political contexts in bioethical discussions to ensure that all communities can achieve true well-being. The positive advancements of science and technology especially in the area of procreation are noteworthy. It critically and methodologically examines the effects and dangers on the society, specifically with regard to history, culture, belief and religion of the people. This inclusive-integrative system does not bifurcate mind from body, subject from object; nor does it separate politics from economy, economy from religion, religion from culture, culture from spirituality, spirituality from education, education from physical existence and physical existence from the totality of life. This philosophical system does not create a hiatus between theory and practice nor action and reaction. It is totally and absolutely inclusive, integrative, and complementary. Hence, transhumanism-enhancement in all its variants should not be treated as a unique isolation, rather as a collective whole, as it pertains to life within the larger society.

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Conflict of interest

I am aware of none.

Authors' Contribution

This work is a brainchild of Newman Ikemefuna Egbo and written by the same.

Availability of data and materials

On request, the research materials on which this study is based are available.



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