

Free argumentative essay about the case for human enhancement technologies

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Humans have been using tools to enhance their own abilities for millennia. In every age, there have been people opposing any perceived unnatural use of tools that could enhance the lives of their users (Rosset), and there has been a discussion around such enhancements for at least the last thousands of years. It seems technological advance has been always regarded with suspicion by certain groups in every time in history, normally condemning it, expressing nostalgia for the old ways and prophesizing the impending end of the world . The same prophesies continue to be voiced by many groups in the present, but majorities seem to have accepted the use of most of the technology that has enabled them to improve the quality of their lives, especially for the last 200 years . However, during the last century there has been a heated debate about the ethical implications in the use of a new kind of tools that could give their users a biological edge over other individuals. This work will review the definitions of therapeutical procedures and enhancements to see if there is a morally discernible difference between them, and then review the ethical issues that may arise from the use of such procedures.

Therapeutic procedures, enhancements and human nature

Humans have always tried to increase their abilities to perform certain tasks with the use of tools such as hammers, forklifts and computers. They also have used other implements like walking canes, lenses and prosthetic limbs, to cope with certain physical disabilities. I might be said that any tool or procedure used for giving someone the chance of recovering a lost capacity is considered to be therapeutic, and any tool or procedure used to give a man an ability that he did not possess before is called and enhancement.

Moreover, people do not seem to have problems with the idea of using technology to give an individual the chance to recover an ability lost due to an accident or a genetic disorder, but are likely to frown at the use of technology as a means to increase the capabilities of an individual beyond average levels. However, the limits between the two definitions is not always clear. A procedure might be therapeutical if given to certain individuals, but would be considered an enhancement if others received it . For example, a person who is unable to concentrate, might use certain drugs that affect her cognitive performance in order to raise her mental capabilities to a level closer to the average, which would be certainly regarded as a therapeutic procedure. But if the same procedure were given to a healthy person to elevate her cognitive abilities further above the average level, then many people would consider it an enhancement and would certainly feel it is an unfair advantage over people who does not possess such enhancement. Another is vaccination, which could be considered a therapeutic procedure destined to keep people healthy, but it can also be seen as an enhancement of the immunological system which gives some individuals an advantage over people who may not have access to the vaccine. Both cases show that the difference between the two procedures is very subjective. The difference is how each case makes people feel about the person receiving the enhancement, and people apparently feel better by helping someone cope with a disability, than helping someone pursue a private objective. On the other hand, the human race has always tried to transcend. The only unique natural trait the human race has, is that of doing things that are beyond their array of abilities with the help of their intellect. Humans in

nature were creatures that just breathed, ate and bred, those were their immanent natural traits and capacities. But they have a tendency to transcend, to establish new goals beyond their original capabilities, and to reach them. This tendency to transcend meant that they stopped being merely human and became something else. In other words, it can be said that the impulse to turn into something other than human, to constantly improve their abilities and quality of life, and to gradually surpass all other human beings that came before them, is within their nature. One can then assume that humans have always and will always try to enhance themselves, and that all the new tools are just furtherances of all previous enhancements men have devised in the past.

Critics to new biotechnological tools

People have always used artificial tools to enhance their performance.

Human life expectancy has tripled since the stone-age. It is said it will reach the hundred years average in the next 60 years , and that will only be possible with the help of technology. Still, some see technological advancement as questionable, and would be happy to limit it for various reasons.

Some might say that the use of certain drugs that deal with mental disorders, or act as cognitive enhancers, might threaten the identity of the individual as those drugs could cause her to act differently than she normally would. But if someone has the inability to take certain decisions because of a mental condition, such inability might count as a handicap as that person would not be able to perform as freely as others can. If certain drug can give

said person the ability to take decisions and be more assertive in life, then it is no different from a disabled person using crutches to be able to walk. Both enhancements are something they could do without, both expand their capabilities, and both help them find their true self since they become able to explore what they are capable of doing with and without the enhancements. One other thing to consider is that sometimes personality enhancements help improve the life of the individual as well as the lives of the people around them, so it should be morally permissible to let people choose whether or not to live a better life.

Other people might say that technological enhancements should be regarded as cheating because they grant abilities that not many individuals possess. However, that would depend on what an individual wants to achieve with certain enhancements. If an individual wants to win an advantage others do not have, she might be tempted to seek the aid of a technological tool to help her secure it. That is what happened in 1965 with an invention that made a whole football team impervious to heat and dehydration, and made them win over other teams that did not have access to the same enhancement. That invention is now called Gatorade . One might wonder if the use of Gatorade by the members of the Florida football team should be considered an unfair advantage, but now it is available to almost anyone in the world as a physical enhancer and is not viewed as an exclusive advantage anymore. The use of cognitive enhancers are also thought to be an unfair advantage, but it depends on what people want to achieve with them. If the goal is to obtain high grades, then it is certainly unfair for other students to let someone use enhancing drugs. But if people want to acquire

skills and knowledge that would help them improve their own lives, then cognitive enhancers are a good way to achieve just that. On the other hand, people might worry that if enhancements are allowed, then it would lead to inequalities caused by the availability of said enhancements and the capacity individuals have to afford them, leaving the poorer portion of society in disadvantage. But, as can be seen, successful enhancements become rapidly available to everyone and prices tend to fall as its use becomes more generalized.

The last argument is widely used to try to slow the advances in technology down, as they can negatively affect the economy. It has been seen however that technical advances become more available and inexpensive as time passes. Enhancements of human capacities such as the cellular phone, the internet and electricity, have started as being luxury items that did not work very well and were only available to an elite, to becoming services that work extremely well and almost at no cost . So the argument that technology might create a division between the wealthy and the poor, is just an attempt to blame technology for something that has always existed, and ignores the fact that it eventually becomes available to everyone.

Finally, it is said that an unlimited increase in the human life expectancy, would lead to a loss in the will to live of human beings, or the start of a dull and meaningless existence . This argument is based on the assumption that what gives meaning to life are the projects individuals embark on, and life would lose meaning once those projects are finished . The argument goes on asserting that even if an individual could embark on other projects as she finishes old ones, it would not be the same person living one life as a project,

but a collection of disconnected lives . This argument does not consider the possibility that a longer life might just give the human race the opportunity to take on bigger and more ambitious projects that could span centuries, giving life a different and deeper meaning.

Conclusions

Physical and cognitive enhancements are technologies that have always thrived no matter how much opposition they have suffered. It is often heard that these enhancements are not natural, but the human race is always trying to improve itself, so it can be said that finding better ways to do things and expand its capabilities is an immanent part of its nature. There are no moral differences between a therapeutic procedure and an enhancing procedure, since both seek to expand the actual capabilities of an individual no matter what made the situation unsatisfactory for him or her. The arguments against the use of technological enhancements have no factual grounds and even if they did, that would not stop them from happening.

Works cited

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