

# The concept and debate of transhumanism



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Introduction:

As human beings, we are obsessed with progressing and improving ourselves. Whether it be physically or mentally, this idea of ‘being better’ is apparent. Transhumanism is an extreme form of ‘improving oneself’. Whether it be being induced with artificial blood, or inserting a microchip into the brain, transhumanism is about making the ordinary, extraordinary! But, is it ethically right and beneficial to test on humans? Should we be ‘messing around’ with the natural creation of our bodies? And can transhumanism be a danger to society? These major ethical questions will be answered in this research paper, where the core value of what a ‘transhuman’ is, will be exposed.

Is transhumanism really beneficial and ethical for human beings?

The definition of ‘Transhumanism’ is the belief or theory that the human race can advance beyond its present physical and mental limitations, especially by the use of science and technology.

We are living in generation, where technology is rapidly evolving and improving. This advancement of technology has benefited people, especially in the transhumanist area. This can be portrayed by the living example of Jesse Sullivan; who is titled as the world’s first “Bionic Man”<sup>1</sup>. Sullivan lost his arm in an accident however, The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, gave him the opportunity to replace his arms with robotic prosthetics. The procedure included connecting his nervous system to the robotic arm, allowing him to lift objects by the power of thought. This procedure proves

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that the marriage of technology and biological components is possible, and really is beneficial to mankind. An arm can't be grown, but technology has given individuals a second chance and an opportunity to have a better quality of life.

Another way in which machinery has positively changed a person's life is the story of a stroke patient who trialled the BrainGate2 System. A brain-computer interface used a 4mm-wide chip<sup>1</sup>, which was implanted in the brain. The significance of this chip was the ability to read signals from neurons which were in charge of motion controlling (e. g., the movement of muscles) and interpret the signals, using a computer, into the physical movement of, such as, a robotic arm and hand. After five years, the chip is still fully working, and the patient is able to carry out daily tasks, which we take granted for, such as raising a cup of coffee to her mouth. This astonishing piece of technology has also given this patient a better quality of life, and furthermore, proves that the study of transhumanism is vital, to help those who need it. Although a robotic arm may be perceived as artificial, and 'unnatural', technology is allowing people to be happier, even after a traumatic event.

The future of transhumanism includes the invention of artificial blood, which improves your stamina. Having a microchip inside your brain, which allows you to communicate telepathically, and being able to become smarter, passively, by storing information into this chip. The possibilities to the way the study of transhumanism can benefit us, is endless.

Is human testing, justifiable?

When it comes to the study of transhumanism, a controversial question always arises; should scientist be allowed to test on human subjects? This concern is portrayed by numerous people (such as religious followers), and what some people claim, is holding scientists and technology back, from rapidlyprogressing[DS4]. Research involving human subjects is not intrinsically ethically dubious. Human testing does have ethical concerns, however, these concerns can be met and eased out. There is a huge importance for human testing as it will create a huge improvement in the quality of lives and number of lives saved through such research <sup>3</sup>, and this can be seen from earlier examples of patients receiving robotic arms. Human testing is vital for the progression of the future.

When conducting experiments on human test subjects, it is essential that the experiment is carried out ethically. This includes asking the participant's permission, fully explaining what the procedure will be, making necessary medical check-ups, and making sure he/she will be safe. Furthermore, external judgement is used to measure the safety of the experiment, and in this case, the ' Research ethics committees' (RECs) are widely used to assess and review trial designs. <sup>4</sup> The importance of these committees is to overview, and evaluate the practices the researcher will conduct on the participant. The committee include both professional and lay perspectives – as to whether the research is ethically acceptable. This portrays that a lot of extensive background checks are carried out, and the safety of the participant is apriority[DS5].

#### PRECAUTIONARY VS PROACTIVE RESEARCH

Scientists, especially those in the transhumanism field, are aware of the cautionary and proactive research. “ We should not reject the products of applied science; neither should we implement powerful new technologies without foresight and proactive preparation.” (www. extropy. org) <sup>5</sup> . Being a proactive researcher, is about taking risks, but doing it for the benefit of making progress in technology. Relying on the evidence from past experiments, and written text books, will not help transhumanism evolve into what it can be fully capable of. Making the robotic arms, was a proactive choice made by scientists, and now, people are reeking the benefits from this. Imagine, what more we can unveil, if scientists keep making this proactive choice.

An alternative response for research is known as the ‘ precautionary principle’. The precautionary principle, proposed as a new guideline in environmental decision making <sup>6</sup> , has four main mechanisms: taking actions to prevent any uncertainties; shifting the burden of proof to the proponents of an activity; finding lots of alternative routes to possibly harmful actions, and getting more public participation in decision making before and during research. “ The precautionary principle highlights this tight, challenging linkage between science and policy.” <sup>6</sup> Although precautionary research is much safer for the participant, the problem with the unwillingness to take risks, means progress is made slower in the technology field. This slows down our advancement for a ‘ better future’ and means people who need these revolutionary machinery in their day to day life (such as robotic legs and arms), have to wait longer[DS6].

## THE NEGATIVES ABOUT TRANSHUMANISM

The main problem with the idea of transhumanism that many face, is if technology is being exploited for our selfish desires? The idea of wanting to live longer, or be smarter and stronger, are selfish desires that people want to achieve, and some perceive as 'unnatural'. As all living things are mortal, the study of transhumanism, is fascinating; a topic in transhumanism includes finding ways to cheat death. Being immortal sounds amazing, but is it realistic? If everyone in this world was immortal, then there will be over population <sup>7</sup>, food shortages, increased global warming and negative climate change. Furthermore, due to overpopulation, there may be a rapid spread of disease, water may run out and fossil fuel will be used up a lot quicker. The world we live in, cannot provide for the immortal.

Transhumanist are optimist that through their technological findings, they can help third world countries such as India, by "skipping industrialization and go straight into late capitalist, post- industrial societies" (Munkittrick). However, from the extremely high pollution levels seen by third world countries such as India and Brazil, this transition is not at smooth, and if anything, is more damaging to the earth. The concept of 'skipping industrialization', for these third world countries, seems very unrealistic, and nothing but a utopian view.

One last negative attitude towards transhumanism, is that it will create a segregation between societies. It is evident, that when technology that can make you 'smarter' or 'live longer' is achieved, the privileged few will be able to have accesses to these traits, which will create and further distance

between people; based on their wealth. Although transhumanism will allow us to benefit traits which will benefit us in the future, it is also possible that there will be more inequality between people and also, earth is not equipped to allow living space for immortal living species.

### MY METHODOLOGY

My report is solely based off secondary research. I have been able to carry out secondary research by reading and actively unpicking online journals and articles (based on transhumanism), visit official which profession transhumanist have written papers and pieces based on this topic.

Furthermore, the use of critiquing text was used, and looking at real life examples of cyborgs was evident. As my research only consisted of secondary data, this meant that a research budget was not necessary, as I was not required to do any primary research.

### TRANSHUMANISM...A BETTER FUTURE?

In conclusion, clearly the study of transhumanism has benefited people in this century. Technology is rapidly evolving and it is fitting the needs of people, whether that be the likes of a robotic arm. Transhumanism is breaking the boundary of people with disabilities, and in this context, closing the inequality gap that many disabled people feel. However, if this research is mistreated, many people will get severely hurt, and it can totally flip, and instead, creates a larger inequality between people. The future of transhumanism is looking bright, and with technology progressing this far, cures for diseases can be found much quicker, and ground breaking technology, can be used to help third world countries. It is the optimism of

the people and scientist, which is needed, if we are to make the future a better place. I truly believe there is a place for transhumanism and cyborgs in the future, but it is up to us to be open minded for this change.

#### REFERENCES[DS10]

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[DS1]This is very bold statement. In the future, try to find any research that can support this claim.

[DS2]This another example where you should use a reference to support the statement.



[DS3]A lot of assumption were made in this paragraph. It will be a good practise in the future to the use a reference to support what you are saying.

[DS4]Reference?

[DS5]Good demonstration of ethical understanding, but the referencing format used was not Harvard referencing.

[DS6]Good points laid out in this section.

[DS7]Avoiding writing academic report in first person, always write them in third person.

[DS8]The context of this statement is not clear.

[DS9]Which research, in what way will it “ flip”, and what source do you have to support this statement?

[DS10]The format used is not Harvard referencing.