



Transhumanism and Well-Being

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3rd Summer School on Sustainable Pharmacy

16 September 2024

**UNI
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Etymology

- Julian Huxley (1887-1975) first uses the term in his book *New Bottles for New Wine* from 1957

“We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps *transhumanism* will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature.”

- *Trans*-humanism → *trans*-cending what it means to be human
- More frequent use in the second half of the 20th century (e.g. by futurists such as FM-2030)

Humanity +:

Transhumanism is...

*1. The intellectual and cultural **movement** that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally **improving the human condition** through applied reason, especially **by developing** and making widely available **technologies** to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.*

[...]

Benjamin Ross:

Transhumanism is a cultural movement which advocates a philosophy predicated on the argument that humans ought to transcend the limits imposed by our biological heritage [by means of technology].

Transhumanists want to abolish the suffering which is a consequence of human finitude by making the boundaries imposed by death, ignorance, and psychological pain obsolete.

Main Goal:

Eradication of all limitations of human beings using technology

- Super-intelligence
- Super-longevity
- **Super-wellbeing**

Proponents & institutions

Proponents

- Nick Bostrom (University of Oxford)
- David Pearce (hedweb.com)
- Max More (Alcor)
- Anders Sandberg (University of Oxford)
- Ray Kurzweil (Google, Alcor)
- Aubrey de Grey (SENS Research Foundation)

Institutions:

- Humanity+ (formerly World Transhumanist Association)
- Future of Humanity Institute at the University of Oxford
- Alcor Life Extension Foundation
- Tech companies such as Neuralink or Google

Trans- vs. Posthumanism

Transhuman:

- Augmented human being
- Possibly still human
- Transition towards the posthuman

Posthuman:

- Completely new species
- Not human anymore
- Superior to humans, unimaginable, beyond our conception

Trans- vs. Posthumanism

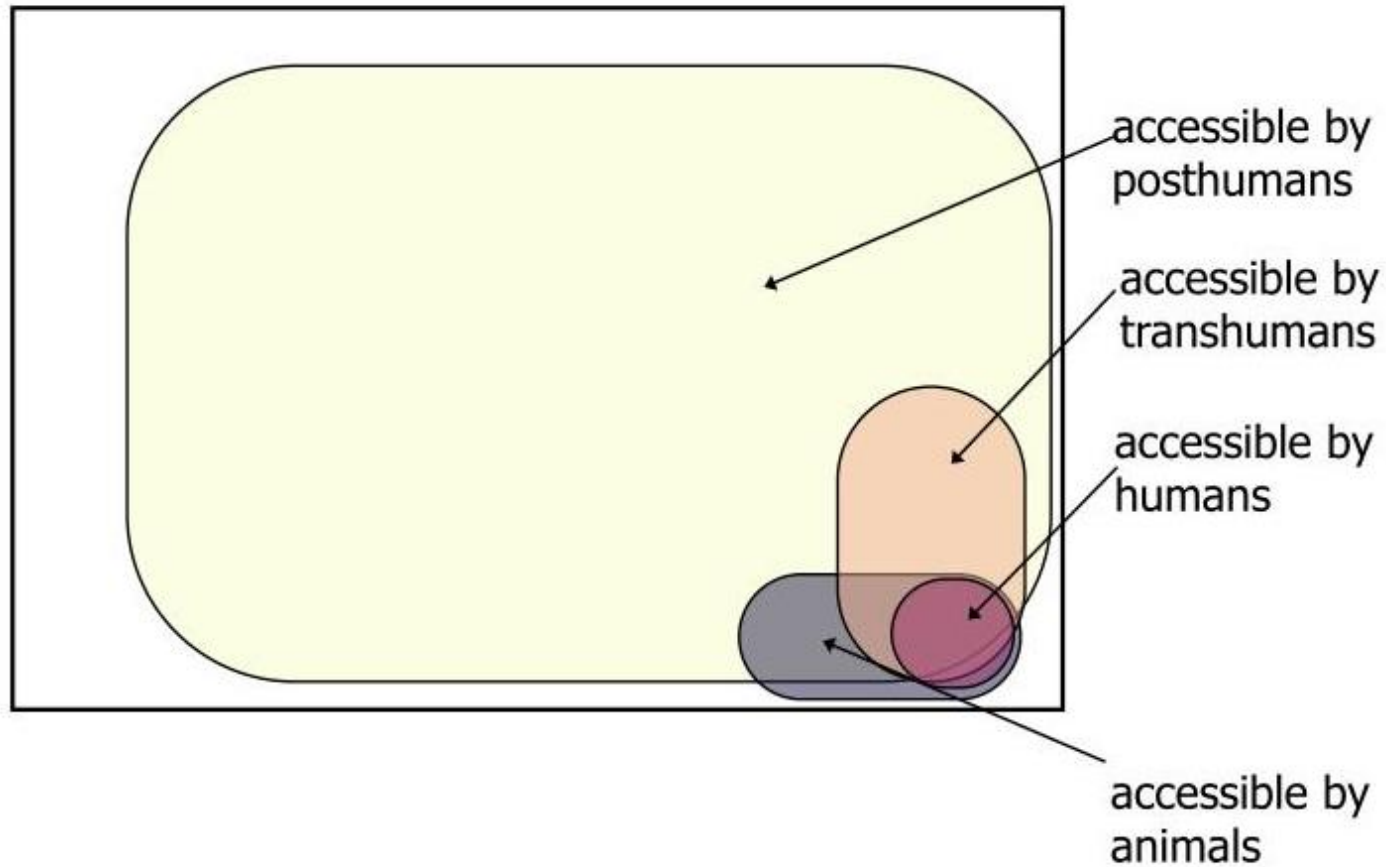


Fig. 1: “The space of possible modes of being” (WTA)

David Pearce's Abolitionist Project

Goal: Complete abolishment of suffering in all sentient life
Creating paradise with help of technology

Vision: An utopia of ever-happy beings which never have any unpleasant experience at all.
("the Naturalisation of Heaven")

Implementation technologies:

- Brain-computer interface
- Biochemicals (aka 'Super-MDMA')
- Nanotechnology
- Genetic alteration of humanity and nature
(e.g. making animals vegan)

David Pearce's Abolitionist Project

The Hedonistic Imperative outlines how nanotechnology and genetic engineering will eliminate aversive experience from the living world. Over the next thousand years or so, the biological substrates of suffering will be eradicated completely. "Physical" and "mental" pain alike are destined to disappear into evolutionary history. The biochemistry of everyday discontents will be genetically phased out too. Instead, matter and energy will get sculpted into perpetually life-loving super-beings. Their states of mind are likely to be incomprehensibly diverse by comparison with today. Yet all will share at least one common feature: a sublime and all-pervasive happiness.

(Introduction to The Hedonistic Imperative)

Historical Precursors

Ancient roots

- Immortality as central theme in scriptures from various cultures (e.g. Gilgamesh, Xian)

Renaissance Humanism

- Anthropocentrism
- Secularity
- Human as deficient being, development of virtues required (The good life must be learned.)

Historical Precursors

Enlightenment

- Rationality and universal laws
- Scientific method for improving human condition
- Individuality (and individual rights)
- Humanity can forge its own fortune (by changing nature)

(Post-) Modernity

- No universal laws anymore
- Constructivism: The world is what we want it to be.
- All limitations to our self-created identity are cruel.
- Humanity is what we make it to be. (changing humanity)

Key Assumptions

From Humanism:

- Human deficiency and imperative for improvement
→ negative, hedonistic Utilitarianism

From Enlightenment:

- Epistemological certainty / Scientism / Techno-Optimism
- Externalism

From Postmodernity:

- Relativism
- Self-determination

Common Hopes and Fears

Hopes:

- Creating paradise, everlasting happiness
- Fulfilling human potential, complete evolution
- At least: fuelling innovation

Fears:

- Inequality
- Immorality
- Unknown future risks of technology

Building the bridge

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

Commonalities of TH and modern medicine:

- Externalism, Scientism
- Aim to relief suffering (negative Utilitarianism)

Differences:

- Transhumanism aims at **improvement of general well-being**
- Medicine traditionally aims at **curing diseases**

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

But can we draw the difference between well-being and absence of diseases?

→ Not if we understand depression (unhappiness) as a disease to be cured.

The difference would only hold for physical diseases.

→ Problem: Placebo effect (Psyche and body cannot be separated!)

→ Mind-body problem

→ If we want to cure the body, we **must not** disregard the psyche.
Healing always involves healing of the soul.

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

Well-being must be the real goal of medicine, if we want to cure, i.e. relief suffering. (curing = well-being)

Central question:

What is well-being and how do we achieve it?

Well-Being and Love

External sphere

What is
(external observer)

vs.

vs.

Internal sphere

How I relate to what is
(individual subject)

Subjectivity is the key issue for well-being

because well-being depends on an internal attitude (selflove),
for as the lack of selflove leads to depression

Internal attitude cannot be forced by external means

→ Well-being cannot be created by external means

Well-Being and Love

But is this true? Can love not be affected by external means?

Answer:

No, it cannot because love is **unconditional**, it is independent from how things are, what one does, etc. (external sphere)

Love is...

- a psychological attitude, a state that we can only allow and experience internally.
- something one recognizes. It cannot be made or manipulated. Its virtue lies in its uncontrollability (in that we cannot understand, make, or fake it). If we can manipulate it, it is conditional and thereby not real love (and we don't want it).

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

How does transhumanism tackle the problem of subjectivity?

→ By substituting human nature with machines
(Motto: no inwardness, no problem)

This is like trying to heal depression through emotional desensitization or suicide.

In this sense, transhumanism is an attempt to create ever-lasting happiness and immortality by gradual suicide.

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

What could be the reason for this paradoxical condition?

- technology gives a notion of control
- control needed because of fear of being bad/unlovable at the core
- lack of trust in (and recognition of) one's loving nature;
If one trusts, one doesn't need control.
If one doesn't trust, one longs for control.

So, why do transhumanists not trust?

- Assumption: missing experience of love and trust (e.g. childhood)

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

Should we refrain from using technology (for augmentation or medicine)?

→ We can use it, but it won't improve (psychological) well-being

But how can we be sure? Maybe it still works?

→ We can try (with the risk of self-destruction) to create well-being with technology. Eventually we will fail anyways (but this individual resistance might be necessary).

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

What remains then?

- We can use technology out of curiosity and fun.
(like we do with dancing, art, music, poetry, etc.)
- What matters is our motivation / attitude.

Doing something
because its 'useful'

vs.

Doing something for
the mere joy of it

TH, Medicine, and Well-Being

If my motivation is decisive, how do I know what my motivation is?

- Embark on a process of self-understanding.
Get to know yourself.
There is no way around that.

Consequences for pharmacy

If we accept this, what would the pharmacy of the future be like then?

It would be a pharmacy...

- whose practitioners embark on a process of self-discovery.
- that opens up to the possibility that it might not be useful and thus might have to abolish itself (or its entitlement).
- that does not take itself too seriously.
- that is practiced from a place of love and curiosity.

A final note

The tragedy of transhumanism is that the life-loving super-beings that its proponents hope to create are already here.

Humans are such loving beings.

But by believing that humans are defective beings, transhumanists deprive themselves of the very experience of their loving nature in the here and now.

Thank you for
your attention!

My website/blog:
benjaminschult.com

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Media links

Fig 1: <https://www.slideserve.com/Jimmy/what-is-transhumanism>

Questions for dialogue

1. What feelings does this elicit in you?
2. Where do you agree or disagree with me?
What was incomprehensible?
3. What does this mean for our understanding of sustainable pharmacy?
4. What consequences do you draw for your own (professional) life?