

### **Abstract**

I argue that transhumanist enhancements are morally impermissible when they threaten autonomy, disrupt feminist ethics, or pose irreversible risks to human nature. Drawing on philosophical and scientific perspectives, I argue that the ethical costs, especially to autonomy and social justice, outweigh potential benefits like improved well-being or longevity.

### **Introduction**

I argue that transhumanist enhancements are impermissible when they compromise human autonomy, disrupt moral frameworks such as feminist ethics, or introduce irreversible risks to human nature, despite their potential to improve well-being. Philosophically, More (2013, 11) contends that enhancements demand the use of morality and reason to overcome mortality, while Lewens (2015, 36–37) highlights a conservative precautionary principle, noting the likely unequal distribution of enhancements, raising concerns about fairness. Scientifically, Dual Inheritance Theory emphasizes that human behavior is shaped by both biology and culture (Tuniz and Vipraio 2020). Feminist ethics supports my thesis by centering lived experiences as essential to moral reasoning (Shafer-Landau 2019, 276) and by warning that some enhancements may undermine social tools that promote justice (Lewens 2015, 118–19). Moreover, autonomy is threatened when enhancement technologies dictate solutions that override individual agency (Shafer-Landau 2019, 36), and as Lewens (2015, 97) suggests, only minimal enhancements that preserve autonomy can be justified. While some argue that restricting enhancements could limit benefits such as increased lifespan (Lewens 2015, 32), May (2023, 195) argues that these advantages would contribute to greater inequality, and instead, we should mitigate this rather than support it.

### Motivation

In order to truly understand why transhumanist enhancements are impermissible in certain situations, we must first understand what transhumanism is and how to navigate its complicated ideas. To start off, More defines the philosophy of transhumanism as a philosophy of life that aims to continue and accelerate intelligent life through the use of science and technology (More 2013, 1). On the surface, it may seem like there is absolutely nothing wrong with this ideology. Shouldn't we just create a superhuman and invent immortality? More elaborates further, stating that in order to shape future evolution and overcome mortality, we must use morality and reason (More 2013, 11). Once we open this philosophical gate, this ideal "superhuman" becomes a bit more complicated. Tim Lewens introduces us to some philosophical and moral qualms when he covers the precautionary principle and its focus on justice and equality (Lewens 2015, 36–37). If we are to introduce transhumanist enhancements, such as CRISPR or immortality, what does that mean for the populace who are not able to receive these enhancements? As Lewens describes, these enhancements are rarely distributed equally, and if the enhancement promotes inequality, it could affect all socioeconomic groups, even those that are enhanced (Lewens 2015, 37). On a scientific note, we must be wary of how transhumanist enhancements will affect the human population. The Dual Inheritance Theory emphasizes that human behavior is shaped by both biology and culture (Tuniz and Vipraio 2020). This is important to note, as introducing transhumanist enhancements without understanding their cultural repercussions risks reducing humanity to a set of biological functions. Technologies like CRISPR, for example, which allow for gene editing, exemplify this risk. While CRISPR may be able to correct genetic disorders, its application for enhancement may lead to risks beyond our comprehension. Lewens explains this concept with genetic modification. It carries

the risk of leading to negative development of some characteristics, even if it positively modifies one, overall possibly having a poor cost-benefit ratio (Lewens 2015, 33). While human enhancements may seem like the perfect solution to our future as a species, even outlined by Szocik as practical for space colonization (Szocik 2023, 85), the moral dilemma arises when we focus on the present and the modern humanity that we coexist in, and the challenges we find with its implementation.

### **Moral Argument**

Now that the background and understanding of transhumanist enhancements is set, it's time to understand the argument as to why they are morally impermissible in certain situations. I am not arguing that human enhancements are morally impermissible in all cases; I argue that they are morally impermissible when they threaten specific aspects of life. To jump right in, feminist ethics raises questions about who controls the discourse and implementation of such technologies. The world, its systems, and even morality have all been shaped by the male gender (Shafer-Landau 2019, 272), and one must wonder if transhumanist enhancements would suffer the same effect. If enhancement decisions are shaped primarily by elite, male-dominated scientific or political institutions, then the resulting technologies may disregard, or even harm, marginalized populations. The future is unpredictable, and if by chance transhumanist enhancements and expectations happened to eliminate gender, then what would become of feminist ethics? The experiences of women are important to an understanding of morality (Shafer-Landau 2019, 272), and if these were to be eradicated by means of "enhancement," what would happen to the morality that feminist ethics creates? Secondly, genetic engineering may focus on selecting traits that will allow for the peak "human." This works hand in hand with the arguments presented by feminist ethics, as these enhancements may disregard natural human

variation, particularly those found among women or racial minorities (Lewens 2015, 118). For instance, designing embryos to conform to idealized traits may prioritize male-coded attributes, reinforcing gender biases. In place of these enhancements, we should focus on changing society and the culture around us (Lewens 2015, 118). A central moral argument against transhumanist enhancements is their threat to human autonomy. Autonomy is not simply the ability to choose, but the ability to choose freely, without coercion or manipulation. Dying patients may turn down medicine, enhancement, or procedures that would inhibit or affect their autonomy (Shafer-Landau 2019, 36). Secondly, autonomy is a foundation for morality according to the Kantian perspective. Our ability to use our autonomy is what has allowed for morality and universal human rights (Shafer-Landau 2019, 172). What is to become of us, if we are to enhance to a point where we don't have our autonomy, many moral institutions and frameworks simply fall apart. As Lewens suggests, we should have minimal enhancements if we are to maintain autonomy (Lewens 2015, 97). With this in mind, if we are to fully proceed with transhumanist enhancements without boundaries, I argue that we lose many moral groundworks, such as feminist ethics and autonomy, the latter of which plays such an important role in humanity.

### **Counterargument**

A common counterargument to this view is that enhancements offer substantial benefits, such as increased lifespan, improved cognition, and the potential to eliminate genetic diseases. By restricting these enhancements, we could limit many possibilities. In this regard, the claim is that the precautionary principle, when it comes to enhancements, should be challenged (Lewens 2015, 32). If technology can alleviate suffering or expand capabilities, then it seems morally wrong to deny these benefits. Technology like CRISPR, which has the possibility of helping millions, seems like a surefire answer. However, this argument overlooks how such advancement

may be illusory. May talks about this illusion in regard to fairness in enhancements. Similar to the argument before, that these types of advancements are not equally distributed, that concern is present here as well. May argues that the advantages provided would contribute to inequality and that the gap between poor and wealthy would increase. As certain enhancements may only be possible for some socioeconomic classes or nations, we should look to mitigate this instead of supporting it (May 2023, 195). By focusing fully on the advantages these transhumanist enhancements bring and on the idea of pushing humanity to the next level, we threaten the social landscape around us. There should instead be a balance, with a priority and focus on achieving a win-win situation (May 2023, 196). This is where the precautionary principle comes into effect. With the future as unstable and unpredictable as it is, and the assumption that humanity will eventually interact with space (Szocik 2023, 5), caution must be taken with enhancements to ensure that moral frameworks, social institutions, and the human race aren't affected drastically to a point of no return. While it may seem morally wrong at first to deny these benefits, a look at the greater picture must be taken to ensure the success of the human population in the future.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while transhumanist enhancements may offer benefits such as longer lifespans or immortality, they are morally impermissible when they threaten core ethical values like autonomy, justice, and feminist ethics. Technology like CRISPR may seem perfect at first but may create risks outside of our current understanding and comprehension. Autonomy, a foundational principle of morality and the Kantian perspective, is especially at risk when enhancements dictate rather than support human choice. While human enhancements and scientific progress are valuable, they must be led with precaution to ensure that the cost to humanity does not outweigh the potential gains.

### References

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