Transhumanism

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Genetically (and biologically) modified man

You can live forever. Well, maybe not today, but in just a few short years you could possibly dodge death, never age a day more, retain that youthful, heavenly skin, and watch your children's children's children grow up into their prime. Yes, perhaps in this lifetime, you could live forever.

With the help of mad scientists and a vision stemming from vanity, curiosity, and health, the fountain of youth has been discovered. But it's no fountain at all. The key to everlasting life is not from a mystical stream of glowing sweet nectar. It's hidden in the codes embedded in microchips and cyberspace.

At least that's what science is suggesting. Based on years of research, a relentless pursuit, and constant upgrades, scientific ingenuity may have discovered a way to stop time, preserve the present, and extend the future.

Technology is moving at an incredible rate, giving humanity the opportunity to probe its curiosity to the point of possibly compromising values and morality. Depending on the perspective of the individual, technology has challenged scholars, common folk, medically disabled, and even the religious and spiritual communities, with the question of whether or not mankind is stepping too far out of bounds.

From genetically modified foods to cloning, every aspect of societal norms is being transformed from its foundational makeup to a progressively accepted copy, or what others believe is a preservation of the original.

But even more than just the physical, humanity is

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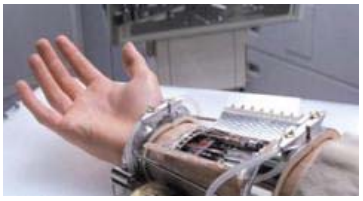

progressively transforming in a metaphysical manner, where spirituality and science blend in a more evolutionary way.

An introduction to transhumanism

In 1957, a scientist and philosopher Julian Huxley, who was the first director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is often credited to coining the term "transhumanism," although that is up for debate.

According to James A. Herrick, author of "The Making of the New Spirituality," transhumanism is "a doctrine of evolutionary progress toward a morally or spiritually perfected race." But to reach this type of perfection, it would be through the combined forces of spirituality and possibly technology.

In his introduction of this new idea, Huxley pointed out that humanity had come to a plateau in the evolutionary process. He claimed that mankind had been "afflicted with misery in one form or another —poverty, disease, ill-health, overwork, cruelty, or oppression." And he further explained that humans have found means of coping with this dreadful reality by creating hopes and ideals. But reality never measured up to humanity's hopes.

So he proposed that it would be through "zestful but scientific exploration of possibilities and of the techniques for realizing them will make our hopes rational, and will set our ideals within the framework of reality, by showing how much of them are indeed realizable."

And so goes the induction of transhumanism.

A futuristic philosopher and speaker, Max More, Ph.D., expands on the decades' old idea with a modern twist, defining transhumanism as the "philosophies of life... that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values."

Natasha Vita-More, chairperson of Humanity+, explained that transhumanism is not only a philosophy, but also a movement.

"It is a transformative process from being exclusively only biological as human with human capabilities and attributes to becoming post-human, which would be a non-biological agency and perpetual experiences," she said. "So it's untethering the human agency of consciousness from the constraints of biology, which is a ticking clock."

Transhumanism is about preserving life and the quality of life through human intervention, so to speak, with technology, science and other means of progression. Many who participate in the movement are searching for ways to eliminate poverty, prolong life through synthetic creations, stop aging, eliminate disease, and project human life into another level of consciousness, so much so that it may be possible to completely replace the biological makeup of humanity in order that individual consciousness be preserved forever.

Through gene therapy and cell-replacement, prosthetics, and stem-cell therapy, she believes the lifespan of human consciousness can be preserved a lot longer than in its organic biological form.

"It looks at the transitional and transformative zone between being human biological to becoming post-human," Vita-More said. " If a post-human could exist on different platforms and in different substrates for example. The only existence that we know as humans is our biological existence. We don't know what it's like to have a computational existence. But if we could transfer our cognition onto non-biological systems that would be a whole other environment."

If you have seen the multifaceted and highly debated movie production, "Avatar," that very existence was realized.

In the movie, human beings were able to transpose their consciousness into a being of a different sort and operate among the native creatures with relative ease. That is just one example of living in a post-humane world.

The technological evolution taking place is already being widely accepted with the development of "bionic" humans. Individuals who have lost limbs at war, never possessed the ability to use certain body parts, or those who are choosing the genetic makeup of their unborn children are all contributing and demonstrating this human transformation. Transhumanists hope for a time when the right to choose is

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accessible to everyone.

Imagine having the ability to replace a failing heart with a brand-new one that is absolutely your own, Vita-More proposed. Science is getting closer and closer to producing new body parts free from the genes that create deadly diseases.

Farming humans, body parts, and current trends

They haven't done it yet, but some scientists are fighting for the right to begin cloning human beings and some have threatened to do it. Stem-cell production, a highly contested and to some a morals-stretching piece of research, remains on the threshold of moving forward with artificial human reproduction. At any rate, cloning is one of those topics that is hard not to have an opinion about.

Cloning, typically understood as one type of reproductive technology, is an umbrella term to describe different means of artificial reproduction. According to the Human Genome Project, cloning encompasses recombinant DNA technology, reproductive cloning, and therapeutic cloning, also known as embryo cloning to produce stem cells.

The first successfully cloned mammal, Dolly the sheep, was born July 5, 1996, thanks to scientists Ian Wilmut and Keith Campbell. Years later, the first cloned mule named Idaho Gem, was born on May 4, 2003. Two others were also produced from the experiment.

Businessman and mule racer Don Jackline originally presented the idea to researchers at the University of Idaho and Utah State University because he wanted to duplicate his champion mule. Mules are predominantly sterile animals since they are hybrids of a male donkey and female horse, both of which have a different number of chromosomes.

As a result, the investor took his interest to a group of researchers in the '80s. Initially, they conducted experiments with embryo transfers, producing three mules that were not identical to the original animal.

With a bit more research and a lot more time, the group of researchers then decided to attempt to produce exact copies of the champion racer. That's when Idaho Gem made its debut.

Since the success of animal cloning has swept the world, several scientists are ready to test the next level. But not all are in agreement with that notion.

Idaho Gem researcher and University of Idaho assistant professor, Dirk Vanderwall, although very excited about the production of sterile animals via cloning, adamantly disagrees with the artificial reproduction of humans through the same process.

"On the aspect of cloning and putting humans in the equation, for therapeutic cloning stem-cell therapy, I personally think there is great potential.... But cloning for people should not be pursued," he said, explaining that stem-cell production presents the opportunity to help in various medical forms. However, outright cloning of human beings is off the table for the scientist.

"I don't see a need to produce human babies with cloning. We've got other assisted reproductive technologies."

He as well as Jackline maintained that there is a popular concern with preserving unique human identities and individual genetic makeup. Cloning humans would run the risk of producing too many of the same genes.

"It is not [ethical to clone humans] because human beings are a different critter, if you will," Jackline said. "You lose genetic diversity, if you will... Is that really the way God intended it?"

When asked if science is stepping too far, he responded, "Absolutely."

But such opinions aren't stopping scientists around the world from pursuing this reproductive method.

According to the University of Utah's Genetic Science Learning Center, some have justified reasons for cloning humans now. For example, just like those who have lost a cat or dog, people lose family members. So through cloning technology, bereaved individuals could replace their lost loved one. Or those who are infertile could have the ability to produce children through cloning technology, although there are other methods of reproduction like in vitro fertilization.

The Human Cloning Foundation names 22 reasons to have humans artificially produced, including

possible medical breakthroughs such as curing cancer; curing infertility; choosing better parents; taking steps toward immortality; financial security; a cure for baldness; and living on in a "later-born twin."

Vanderwall commented that the technology is nearly there. Whether or not people will actively pursue it is the question.

But in the meantime, stem-cell production and therapy has been given the green light by government and a larger part of the science community.

In May, it was revealed that Major League Baseball player, Bartolo Colon received controversial stem-cell therapy to aid the repair of his shredded rotator cuff and torn ligaments in his arm.
Doctors extracted fat and bone marrow stem cells from the baseball player and injected them into his arm and shoulder.

A year after treatment, he was back on his game, making almost $900,000 a year, according to news reports. Without the treatment, Colon's injured arm and shoulder would have been the end of his career.

Not only did Colon's medical procedure raise eyebrows in the sports world, but it also shed light on the possibilities of regenerative therapies for anti-aging.

Along the same lines of cloning and stem-cell therapy, an even more current and actively used type of therapy—hormone replacement—falls right in line.

Nancy Deville, a health writer, advocates hormone replacement therapies. She, as well as many scientists, believes that people age because hormone levels begin to decrease with time. Instead of aging, becoming decrepit with disease and dying organs, Deville discovered the use of hormones. Appearing half her age, the 68-year-old began using bio-identical hormone (hormones that are identical in molecular structure to hormones in the body) replacement in her 40s. She says she is able to bike 50 miles, do all the things young adults are able to, and she feels good.

"One of my concerns is the way people are dying. People are aging in a really accelerated way," she laments, adding that people in their old age are hooked up to machines and are on a daily cocktail of prescription drugs.

She says that through bio-identical hormone replacement therapy, aging could be slowed tremendously and health preserved extensively.

All things considered
The subject of transhumanism is a controversial one, on one end there are those who identify the science of technology for the use of help and health. On the other end are those who want to replace humanity, in the biological sense, completely with technology.

Michal Meyer, Ph.D., editor in chief for the Chemical Heritage magazine, sees the transhumanism movement as theology clad in scientific jargon.

"We human beings have always used technology… to change our environment. The first time we created fire, that's a use of technology. Building is a use of technology, creating roads, science, everything like that. We have used technology to change our environment. We have used it to change things around us rather than ourselves. Now transhumanism is different because it wants to use technology on the human body, not on the environment outside of the human body. And its goal is basically to transcend human biological limitations. The ultimate goal is basically technological immortality, or what we call post-humanism," she explained.

Meyer added that the ideology sees mortality as the problem and technology as the solution. Further, she explained that the biological makeup of the human body such as genes, DNA and cells are all a part of a network with codes. And with codes, there is decoding and recoding such that as in gene therapy and cloning and avatars.

"The more extreme branch of transhumanism is interested in the mind and consciousness. And what they tend to do is treat the mind as software and the body as hardware," Meyer said. "So ultimately the [way the] thinking goes is that we may be able to get better hardware … And as hardware, as our bodies wear out, you just upload yourself onto something better … They are trying to overcome death. That's

where I see the crossover between theology and science."

Sadiki Bakari, a Los Angeles-based author and researcher, began to discover the long-term effects of the movement and the overall implications transhumanism could have on the development of humanity in all areas, including spirituality.

The researcher highlighted that because consciousness is not scientific, the movement is attempting to see or "colonize" consciousness or the soul by capturing it in a synthetic creation.
"We are talking about humans being linked to a super computer. And this computer could control thought and emotions," Bakari said.

Meyer subscribes to a similar notion.

"If you look at science it deals with the laws of nature. What goes beyond science is that you can separate the consciousness from our biological bodies. As human beings ... consciousness is not very well understood by science, but is very well connected to our biological bodies. There is no consciousness without biology," Meyer explained. "Science has nothing to say about a disembodied consciousness without biology.

"And what happens after we die is not a place where it has been able to go. This idea that we can just treat our consciousness as information doesn't really have a place in science."

Bakari also pointed to perceptional mild versions of the movement like vaccines, birth control, identity chips as part of the forward marching transition of the human experience from biological to bionic.

Bakari believes that transhumanism is a modern form of eugenics.

"Transhumanism is a newer form of eugenics. So when we are dealing with transhumanism, we are dealing with eugenics and biological warfare, genetic modification, class system, superiority verses inferiority, and the idea of so-called race. The point of transhumanism is so-called immortality or to enhance ones physiological, biological and psychological body."

He added that heavy propaganda via big screen movies, children's cartoons and even music videos contribute to the forward motion of the transhumanist ideas. For example, "I, Robot" starring Will Smith, depicted an African American skeptic who eventually accepted the union of humans and technology. A major factor in the story line was the proposition that a robot could have consciousness and feelings.

Other movies like "Surrogate" suppose a world where robots replace humans altogether.
Bakari said when looked at in perspective, transhumanism is generally an attack on humanity. However, he does support the idea of ethical uses of technology in terms of prosthetics and giving people the ability to walk again.

Meyer agrees in that sense. She conceded that technology has the potential to help and support medical advances, but altering the fabric of humanity is questionable.

But when it comes to eugenics, they also agree that there is a need to probe the roots of transhumanism and the thrust of transforming humanity.

"Why would someone want to enhance themselves technologically with robotics and cybernetics and things of that nature? When dealing with that, what Western science has put forth is this notion of population verses depopulation," Bakari noted. "Now, we have to be clear about who has the population problem and who doesn't. So when you deal with that question and understand who has the population problem and who is dealing with depopulation based on their genetic makeup, who is depopulating? When you deal with that question [you will] understand why Western science would want to create these types of enhancements to keep themselves alive."
Further, he intimated that people of color scientifically have higher birth rates while those of European descent have much lower rates.

To put things a bit in perspective, Bill Gates, made an unapologetically controversial statement regarding population control and technology last year at the 2010 TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) conference.

He explained that the increasing amount of carbon dioxide, which is contributing to global warming, is based on the number of people (world population), services per person, energy per service and the carbon dioxide per unit of energy. In order to completely eliminate the amount of waste, he proposed, just like high school algebra, one of the factors has to get down to close to zero.

"Today the world has about 6.8 billion people. That's headed up to about 9 billion. If we do a really great job on new vaccines, healthcare, reproductive services. We can lower that to about 10 to 15 percent," he supposed.

Population is an issue among the elite.

When asked whether or not technology at extreme levels could possibly separate classes further than they have been threatened, Meyer was unsure, but brought up the issue of affordability with the advanced technology. As of now, the access is mostly available to the wealthy and privileged.
As humanity trudges forward in this thing called life, technology is becoming more and more a part of societal normalcy. Pets and humans are being chipped, men and women are choosing to seek artificial forms to extend life, and the rich are deciding what their children will look like.

Some say it could be five years or 50 years from now that science and humans become one. Others hope this destiny is never realized.

| *Tags: Bartolo Colon, Chemical Heritage magazine, Dirk Vanderwall, Don Jackline, Human Genome Project, Ian Wilmut, Idaho Gem, James A. Herrick, Julian Huxley, Keith Campbel, Major League Baseball, Max More, Michal Meyer, Nancy Deville, Natasha Vita-More, Ph.D., Sadiki Bakari, Scientific and Cultural Organization, The Human Cloning Foundation, transhumanism, UNESCO, United Nations Educational, University of Idaho, University of Utah's Genetic Science Learning Center, Utah State University, Vita-More, Will Smith*

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For most of the world’s post-biblical history the story of naked Noah and his sons has been the single greatest justification for the enslavement of individuals of African heritage, according to David M. Goldenberg author of “The Curse of Ham: Race Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam.”

According to Goldenberg the scripture describing Ham’s act denied minorities equal treatment wherever religious majorities believed, as a matter of faith, that racial variation from “whiteness” was malignant.

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