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#### **Unveiling the right to self-transformation and self-enhancement: exploring Transhumanism and its impact on human rights and the future of humanity**

Desvelando el derecho a la autotransformación y la mejora de uno mismo: explorando el transhumanismo y su impacto en los derechos humanos y el futuro de la humanidad

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# Unveiling the right to self-transformation and self-enhancement: exploring Transhumanism and its impact on human rights and the future of humanity

Desvelando el derecho a la autotransformación y la mejora de uno mismo: explorando el transhumanismo y su impacto en los derechos humanos y el futuro de la humanidad

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**Summary:** Introduction. 1. Transhumanism: How it started, where and what it is? 1.1. Analysis. 2. Exploring the core values and objectives of Transhumanism. 2.1. To overcome human limitations. 2.2. Transhumanism anticipates the emergence of a post-human state. 3. Critiques of Transhumanism. 3.1. Practical criticism (viability and realism). 3.2. Socio-legal criticism. 3.3. Moral or ethical criticism. 4. Analysing transhumanism and the concept of international human rights. 4.1. Human rights are indirectly invoked to reshape the current human condition. 4.2. A new set of rights is proposed to fully realise the new being (the enhanced man). 4.3. Transhumanism is a movement about the Rights of Individuals, not essentially Human rights in a collective sense. Conclusion. Bibliography.

**Abstract:** The time to discuss, contemplate and philosophize about Transhumanism has inevitably come. Thanks to technology which continues to transform human lives in enormous ways. The length at which technology can go, and how far it can take humans is what transhumanism as a philosophy aims to explore. The significance of studying transhumanism lies not in personal beliefs but in the necessity to confront the profound questions surrounding technology's influence on human life. Understanding

transhumanism has become crucial in the contemporary world because radical transformations through technology are already underway. Consequently, contemplating transhumanism prompts critical thinking about the trajectory of humanity in the face of advancing technology. This exploration raises fundamental questions about the protection of human rights in an era where individuals are willing to undergo radical transformations. An intriguing question emerges about the reception of transhumanism: Could or should it be considered a right to which individuals may be entitled?

**Keywords:** Advanced technologies, transhumanism, human enhancement, self-transformation, human rights, humanity.

**Resumen:** El momento para debatir, contemplar y filosofar sobre el transhumanismo inevitablemente ha llegado. Y ello gracias a la tecnología, que sigue transformando de forma importante la vida humana. El transhumanismo como filosofía pretende explorar hasta dónde puede llegar la tecnología y hasta dónde puede llevar a las personas humanas. La importancia de estudiar el transhumanismo no radica en las creencias personales, sino en la necesidad de afrontar las profundas cuestiones que rodean la influencia de la tecnología en la vida humana. Comprender el transhumanismo se ha convertido en algo crucial en el mundo contemporáneo, porque ya se están produciendo transformaciones radicales a través de la tecnología. En consecuencia, contemplar el transhumanismo suscita un pensamiento crítico sobre la trayectoria de la humanidad ante el avance de la tecnología. Esta exploración plantea cuestiones fundamentales sobre la protección de los derechos humanos en una era en la que los individuos están dispuestos a someterse a transformaciones radicales. Una pregunta intrigante emerge en torno a la recepción del transhumanismo: ¿podría o debería considerarse un derecho al que pueden acogerse los individuos?

**Palabras clave:** Tecnologías avanzadas, transhumanismo, mejora humana, autotransformación, derechos humanos, humanidad.

## Introduction

The rate at which the world is evolving places the future of humanity in between two visions. On one hand, there is a reason to be optimistic about a better tomorrow. On the other hand, there are glimpses of change that incite concern and lamentation amidst these swift transformations. Uncertainty has always surrounded the future, but with scientific innovations and emerging technologies, the path ahead becomes even more uncertain and blurry. Throughout the course of human evolution, it is evident that change and progress are deeply ingrained desires. However, history teaches that not all changes are desirable or worthy of embrace. In the realm of evolution, transhumanism emerges as a philosophical approach that envisions a radical future for humans using scientific innovations and technological advancements. Nevertheless, transhumanism also faces criticism for its disregard for human nature and its aspirations to fundamentally reshape it. In light of these considerations, the question arises: Where should transhumanism be positioned? Is it a beacon of hope for humanity, or does it signify the potential demise of human essence?

In a world where human rights are universally recognized as inherent to the essence of every individual, how should one approach the philosophy of transhumanism? What are the reasons for raising objections to transhumanism's agenda of human enhancement through science and emerging technologies? These questions lie at the heart of this paper, which aims to explore, analyse, and clarify the concept of transhumanism. To achieve this goal, the paper is structured into various sections, each focusing on specific aspects. To begin with, a historical inquiry into the origins of Transhumanism is conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of its significance. It becomes evident that transhumanism has evolved as a philosophical and cultural movement, lacking a universally agreed-upon definition. Nonetheless, by examining the perspectives of its advocates and prominent figures, common elements can be identified that form the core of its essence.

Furthermore, this paper will delve into the values and objectives of transhumanism, aiming to shed light on the true agenda that Transhumanists advocate for, as reflected in their literature and advocacy efforts. By examining their intentions and goals, it becomes apparent that the accusations levelled against Transhumanists do not always align with their actual positions. Additionally, this paper will address various criticisms raised by opponents of transhumanism, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within, and

surrounding this philosophical movement. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that objections to transhumanism are not solely grounded in valid concerns; while some criticisms hold merit, others stem from underlying misconceptions and a lack of understanding.

Additionally, this paper will examine the impact of transhumanism on the concept of Human Rights and explore the relationship between these two ideas. It will investigate whether Transhumanists approach human enhancement in a manner that aligns with current standards of International Human Rights Law, or if there exists a level of compatibility and potential influence between the two concepts. Through this analysis, the paper will formulate three statements that encapsulate the connection between transhumanism and human rights.

In conclusion, the central message conveyed is that despite some individuals' reluctance to engage with or consider transhumanism, a thorough examination of this philosophy is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of its implications. Making an informed objection or acceptance of transhumanism necessitates a comprehensive study. This paper argues that while not all of transhumanism's goals may be achievable, it does not rule out the possibility of others. If any of these goals were to be realized, the future of humanity would face significant challenges and transformations.

## 1. Transhumanism: How it started, where and what it is?

The origin of the term transhumanism remains a subject of scholarly debate. However, it is widely acknowledged that Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)<sup>1</sup> was the first to use a similar term '*transumanare*' in his renowned work *La Divina Commedia*<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, according to Walker and Solana, Dante's usage of the term differs significantly from its contemporary understanding (Walker and Solana 2015, 3). In Dante's context, as More (2013) explains, the term held religious and spiritual connotations. Present-day transhumanism, on the other hand,

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<sup>1</sup> Dante Alighieri an Italian poet, writer, and philosopher is renowned for his magnum opus "*La Divina Commedia*" (The Divine Comedy), which features the earliest known usage of the term "transumanare", meaning to transhumanize. See: <https://www.biography.com/writer/dante>.

<sup>2</sup> According to Google Books website, Dante's book has been selected by scholars as being culturally important, and part of the knowledge base of civilization. This explains why the origins of Transhumanism are traced to this work.

is grounded in science and technology, detached from religious connotations. In fact, Vernon (2021) argues that the term transhumanism has been colonised by technologists envisioning utopia<sup>3</sup>.

Etymologically, transhumanism is believed to stem from the Italian verb 'transumanare', which means "to go beyond the human condition and perception."<sup>4</sup> Max More (2013) states that Dante Alighieri used the term *transumanare*, to signify the surpassing of the human<sup>5</sup>. Vita-More (2019), a transhumanist, suggests that the English translation is "to transhumanate or transhumanize". Thus, while the meaning of the term (transhumanism), has evolved over time, it is evident that Dante Alighieri's contributions shaped not only the understanding of the human body and mind but have also influenced contemporary scientific thought.

Furthermore, the contemporary understanding of transhumanism can be traced back to Julian Huxley's influential essay in 1957, which laid a solid foundation for the comprehension of this term. In his essay on Transhumanism, Huxley (1957, 13-17) presented transhumanism as a belief in the potential of new possibilities for humanity and the future, driven by emerging technological advancements. He explicitly stated, "I believe in transhumanism" (Huxley 1957, 17). Therefore, during that period, transhumanism was primarily a belief system. Max More (2013) contends that Dante Alighieri did not develop this evolutionary perspective into a philosophical position, as his usage of the term came to light years later after the term had independently been coined as part of the contemporary Transhumanist movement (More 2013).

Nonetheless, Huxley's essay provides a significant understanding of transhumanism. He describes transhumanism as "man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his nature" (Huxley 1957, 17). This view of transhumanism provokes and has sparked various reactions, especially regarding the extent to which human enhancement can be achieved. However, despite its loopholes,

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<sup>3</sup> For some people, transhumanism is a mere utopian ideology, whereas for others, like Llano (2019, 39) "the transhumanist movement is much more than a simple utopia."

<sup>4</sup> While the precise origins of transhumanism remain a subject of debate among scholars, a considerable body of literature and scholarly research associates the etymology of the term with Dante's Divine Comedy. For instance, Webb (2016) explores this connection, discussing the ethical implications of transhumanism within the context of Dante's work.

<sup>5</sup> In the words of Max More (2013, chapter 1), "Dante Alighieri uses the term *transumanare*, meaning to pass beyond the human".

it encapsulates a crucial idea that has played a significant role in the development and dissemination of this philosophical movement surrounding human modification. In contemporary times, Transhumanists aspire to redesign human life and pursue radical reconfigurations, thus expanding upon Huxley's original vision of transhumanism. Notably, Huxley's perspective does not portray transhumanism as a philosophy that envisions a transformation beyond humanity, in the sense of post-humanity (Huxley 1957).

Before delving deep, it is paramount to adhere to this definition and analyse its implications on the contemporary concept of transhumanism. Firstly, it can be observed and understood from Huxley (1957) that the objective of transhumanism is to enhance rather than destroy humans. Therefore, transhumanism, in this sense, entails a strong optimistic belief in a better future for humanity through technology. Huxley's (1957, 15) assertion that "scientific and technical explorations have given Common Man all over the world a notion of physical possibilities", indicates that the true origin of this idea, philosophy and worldview is predominantly driven by the scientific revolution and technological advancement. Consequently, it follows that when transhumanism is discussed nowadays, transhumanists emphasize the potential influence that technology can have or bring about on humanity and its future. Supporting this notion, Graham (2002, 65) defines transhumanism as "a futuristic philosophy which celebrates the potential of advanced technologies to augment human functioning to unprecedented degrees, ushering in a new phase of 'posthuman' evolution". Thus, one can argue that this philosophy of transhumanism serves as a form of acknowledgement of the significance of technology and its envisioned capabilities in shaping human life.

Simultaneously, transhumanism represents a new paradigm for thinking about humankind's future (Bostrom 2001a). Expanding on this, transhumanism can be viewed as a concept that examines both the present and the future, making it a presentist concept with strong forward-looking values and principles. It is present because we currently reside in an era where technology plays a huge part in our lives. Furthermore, it is forward-looking because it embraces an optimistic belief that, in the future, biotechnology could be utilized to transcend human limitations and enhance human condition.

Vita-More (2019, 49) defines transhumanism as a philosophy that

deals with the fundamental nature of reality, knowledge, and existence. As a worldview, it offers a cultural ecology for

understanding human integration with technology. As a scientific study, it provides the techniques for observing how technology is shaping society and the practice for investigating ethical outcomes.

Thus, simply put forward, transhumanism can be understood as a multifaceted term encompassing three key aspects; it is a philosophy, worldview, and scientific study<sup>6</sup>, all focused on exploring new possibilities through technology to enhance or transcend the human condition. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that as noted by Trippet (2018) “transhumanism has come to connote different things for different people, from a belief system to a cultural movement, a field of technological fantasy”. Therefore, it can be argued that how one views and where he or she places transhumanism, whether as a worldview, philosophy or a scientific study reflects the value one attaches to this concept<sup>7</sup>.

Max More (1990, 1) defined transhumanism as “a class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its current human form and human limitations by means of science and technology”. It is important to note that Max More is credited with formalizing the transhumanism doctrine through the “Principles of Extropy”<sup>8</sup> (Tirosh-Samuelson 2009) and that his definition of transhumanism highlights the role of technological innovations and scientific study. Transhumanists perceive human nature “as a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remould in desirable ways” (Bostrom 2003b, 493). They view the current human condition as incomplete and believe that transhumanism offers the potential to embrace a more advanced form of humanity. Hence, for Transhumanists, transhumanism offers the possibility to be more humane. In fact, Bostrom (2003c, 4) emphasizes that “Transhumanism is a way of thinking about the future that is based on the premise that the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development but rather a comparatively

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<sup>6</sup> For Llano (2019), transhumanism is “a scientific and philosophical project”, advocating for the use of advanced technologies to significantly increase “the physical, cognitive, sensory, moral and emotional capabilities of human beings”.

<sup>7</sup> However, the lack of a universally recognised definition of transhumanism leads to confusion and misinterpretation which hinders meaningful discourse. Without clear consensus, different individuals may have disparate understandings of transhumanism, making it challenging to address its ethical, human rights and social implications, broadly.

<sup>8</sup> See generally Max More (2004).



early phase". Thus, in this way transhumanism can be understood as a project seeking for human development.

In addition to the above definitions, the Humanity Plus Organization's<sup>9</sup> presents two formal meanings of transhumanism. Firstly, transhumanism is described as,

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 ageing and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.

Secondly, transhumanism is also defined as,

The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies. (Humanity Plus Organization n.d.).

Therefore, in this perspective, transhumanism aims to challenge the traditional norms regarding human life, the human body, and human nature, empowering individuals to actively shape their own future. It is no surprise that Souza (2020) considers transhumanism as "a constant search for biological rearrangement of human species dissatisfied in the face of its own limitations."

### 1.1. *Analysis*

As demonstrated above, there is no consensus on the exact definition of transhumanism. Consequently, it is easy and common to associate transhumanism, with notions that are not truly constitutive of what it is, hence the need to pay attention. The meaning of transhumanism continues to evolve and change with time due to several factors. In this process and in the history of its development transhumanism continues to emphasize certain aspects while at the same time leaving a few things less attended to or clarified. Its roots

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<sup>9</sup> Humanity+ is a non-profit international educational organization that advocates the ethical use of technologies and evidence-based science to improve the human condition. It was formerly called the World Transhumanist Association. For more information see: <https://www.humanityplus.org/>.

are much more complex and deeper than what has been presented in this paper, thus, transhumanism is not a philosophy that sprung from nowhere. It has a history, and from what has been said so far, it is a consequence of human evolution and comes as a quest stemming from the desire of other human beings to explore and fully discover their nature with the help of science and emerging technologies. Hence, even though there is no one uniform way to explicate its meaning, it is sufficient and accurate to assert that at the core of transhumanism are science and technological innovations. However, the problem is not science or these envisaged technologies but the human desire, that of the Transhumanists which aims beyond the boundaries of human limitations. The very idea that the philosophy of transhumanism does not believe in human limitations is what undermines its essence and makes it way too ambitious, what others have called utopia<sup>10</sup>. Hence, this school of thought, at present, fails itself in failing to explain its limitations because it is too obsessed with perfection, something that is inherently beyond human attainment. Technology cannot eliminate every human imperfection; these will persist despite technological advancements. This is the truth to be accepted by advocates of transhumanism. Nevertheless, it is still useful to consider what they have to say and how this may impact human rights and the future of humanity.

## 2. Exploring the core values and objectives of Transhumanism

For transhumanism is more than just an abstract belief that we are about to transcend our biological limitations by means of technology; it is also an attempt to re-evaluate the entire human predicament as traditionally conceived. (Bostrom 2001a)

Having provided a general definition of transhumanism, it has become clear what the philosophy of transhumanism is and how it came about. Be that as it may, this is not the whole story, it is just the beginning, thus the next questions that this paper now deals with are: What are the goals and values of Transhumanism? And why it matters? As Bostrom (2001a), in the above quote emphasizes that transhumanism is not just a form of ordinary philosophy or a mere worldview, it is a futuristic vision that challenges conventional

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<sup>10</sup> For criticism of transhumanism as a utopian ideology see e.g., Déchamp-Le Roux (2016). See also, Roberto Paura (2016).

conceptions about the human condition and limitations. Bostrom (2001) essentially points out that “Transhumanism is not only an area of study but also a worldview that has a value component”. By exploring the objectives of transhumanism, we can gain insight into the significance of this movement and its potential impact on human development and society.

Given its multifaceted nature, it is not surprising that transhumanism encompasses various perspectives and agendas, making it a complex philosophy. It is for this reason that More (2013, 26) contends that “to write about transhumanism is a little daring”. Likewise, McCollum (2015, 5) argues that “when we discuss Transhumanism. We are not referencing a topic that is as simple as its definition...”. Thus, the controversy surrounding transhumanism extends beyond its definition and delves into the diverse ideologies within the transhumanism project. Consequently, there are multiple grounds and approaches through which transhumanism is advocated. While there is, strictly speaking, no clear-cut distinction between transhumanist advocates and theorists, it is possible to differentiate between those who envision radical changes, such as those who support technological singularity, and those who view transhumanism as a possibility to improve the human condition without radically challenging its current state. More’s perspective aligns with the latter, as he acknowledges that “others expect technology to advance at different rates in various sectors and to go through faster and slower periods...” (More 2013, chapter 1).

Due to the lack of consensus within the transhumanism movement itself, addressing the goals of transhumanism is not a straightforward task. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify certain shared core elements that constitute transhumanist worldview. Despite this, misconceptions about the true intentions of transhumanism and its advocates persist and are fuelled by misinterpretations of its agenda. Critics of transhumanism have often based their objections on flawed interpretations rather than justified concerns. This paper argues that transhumanism has two primary goals: firstly, the desire to overcome human limitations and secondly, the aspiration to ultimately transition into a posthuman state. However, these goals should not be understood as the sole definitive objectives of transhumanism and should not be extrapolated beyond the scope of this research, as doing so might lead to a misinterpretation of the philosophy of transhumanism.

## 2.1. *To overcome human limitations*

First and foremost, transhumanism aims at overcoming human limitations. Bostrom (2003b, 6) highlights that the focus of transhumanism is “on those technologies that either pose a threat to the survival of the human civilization or, in contrast, promise to create opportunities for overcoming fundamental human limitations”. Transhumanists often emphasise the concept of “human limitations” as they advocate for transforming or enhancing human life beyond its current state. This distinction between transhumanism and secular humanism is significant for Bostrom (2003b), as he believes that transhumanism encompasses not only traditional means of improving the human condition but also the utilization of science, technology, and empirical methods to enhance the physiological aspects of the human organism<sup>11</sup>. It is understandable why Bostrom (2003b) as an Oxford philosopher and co-founder of Humanity Plus takes this stance, as he views our current condition as “a half-baked project”<sup>12</sup>.

Transhumanism proponents perceive themselves as participants in a project aimed at surpassing the inherent limitations of human nature. These limitations, which they seek to overcome are aptly described by More who asserts that transhumanism is a school of thought that “refuses to accept traditional human limitations such as death, disease and other more biological frailties”<sup>13</sup> (More, 1990). In this sense, when discussing transhumanism, its advocates argue that technology can be employed to conquer death, leading to extended lifespans and improved overall health. In fact, the Transhumanist Manifesto initially published in 1993 and revised in 2020, proclaims that challenging the human condition involves recognizing ageing as a disease and deems augmentation and enhancement of the human body and mind as

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<sup>11</sup> The Traditional means (such as education and cultural refinement) of improving human nature are not considered by the Transhumanists to be the best techniques, rather the application of science and advanced technologies is regarded as the best mechanism to fully transform human nature.

<sup>12</sup> See generally More (1990), discussing generally the idea that the current human condition does not entail an end to further evolution and thus supporting the idea that, human nature is currently in the process of evolution.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, as will be discussed later, the ultimate goal for Transhumanists is to defeat death and thereby achieve an ever-lasting life or existence. It is interesting that for Transhumanists, death is not considered natural but rather a mere human weakness that can be conquered. But see, Adam (2023) discussing Transhumanism and the notions of death, at the very beginning of the article in a spoiler alert, he vividly writes, “everyone dies”.

necessary means to triumph (Vita-More 2020). McKie (2018), further highlights that, while the idea of using technology to enhance the human body is not new, transhumanists take this concept to an unprecedented extent. He goes on to suggest that, “ultimately, by merging man and machine, science will produce humans who have vastly increased intelligence, strength, and lifespan, a near embodiment of gods.” (McKie 2018). Thus, transhumanism fundamentally represents a project that regards technological advancements as essential for the development of the human body and mind, ultimately breaking the limits of human potential. This resonates with what Agar (2010) calls radical enhancement, which entails the fundamental improvement of human attributes and capabilities beyond what is currently possible for humans.

The goal of overcoming human limitations within transhumanism has faced substantial criticism from bio-conservatives and other dissenting individuals. One such critic is Wieseltier<sup>14</sup>, who during the Nexus Conference in 2018<sup>15</sup>, vehemently questioned both the desirability and feasibility of transcending human limitations. Wieseltier (2018) argues that transhumanism, being a human project conceived and pursued by humans, he fails to accept its precepts. He contends that there are two types of people: those who despise limits and constantly strive to surpass them, and those who respect limits as constitutive of the meaning of life, viewing them not merely as obstacles to overcome but as integral to human existence. For Wieseltier, transhumanists are the opposite of the latter, they do not value human limitations.

This provocative aspiration of transhumanists to transcend human limitations also prompts substantial questioning from many individuals regarding its plausibility. However, from the perspective of

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<sup>14</sup> According to The Nexus Institute (2021), on the Speaker’s biography, Leon Wieseltier (United States, 1952) is an American Jewish thinker and the founder and editor of *Liberties*, a journal of culture and politics. Through the views he expressed during the interview, there is no doubt that he is a huge opponent of the Transhumanism philosophy.

<sup>15</sup> The 2018 Nexus Conference was a conference organised and hosted by The Nexus Institute, which generally hosts debates on pressing contemporary questions with the world’s foremost thinkers, artists, and political leaders. In particular, the 2018 Nexus Conference was organised under the theme “The Battle between Good and Evil, in which the concept of Transhumanism was also discussed in the roundtable featuring important figures like Natasha Vita-More, a Transhumanist and Leon Wieseltier, among others. See generally; <https://nexus-instituut.nl/en/activity/the-battle=between-good-and-evil>. For Leon Wieseltier’s views on transhumanism, see Nexus Institute (2019).

transhumanists, the goal of surpassing human limitations is neither a utopian vision nor a mere scientific fantasy. They consider it not only desirable but also a realistic possibility to be achieved. For example, the Transhumanism Declaration articulates this perspective in Article 2, stating that “we believe that humanity’s potential is still mostly unrealized” (Transhumanism Declaration, Article 2). Hence, in this way, transhumanism comes forward as a philosophy that challenges not only what it means to be human but also underscores that our current understanding of human capabilities does not provide a complete portrayal of our true potential.

## 2.2. *Transhumanism anticipates the emergence of a post-human state*

It is paramount to differentiate transhumanism from the concept of post-humanity, as they are distinct yet interconnected. Transhumanism primarily focuses on the use of biotechnology to enhance the human condition. On the other hand, post-humanity refers to “the possible future beings whose basic capacities so radically exceed those of present humans as to be no longer unambiguously human by our current standard” (Bostrom, 2003c, 5). However, there is a strong correlation between these two concepts. Transhumanists commonly use the term post-humanity to signify the stage beyond the limitations of the current human condition (Cennet 2012). According to Bostrom (2003c), many transhumanists aspire to pursue paths that would eventually lead to becoming posthuman beings. However, it is important to emphasize that post-humanity is not the sole objective or goal of transhumanism, but rather a future possibility to be achieved gradually. To illustrate this, Bostrom clearly acknowledges that “the changes required to make us posthuman are too profound to be achievable by merely altering some aspect of psychological theory... radical technological modifications to our brains and bodies are needed” (Bostrom 2003c). Thus, it is essential to highlight the subtle distinction between, transhumanism and posthumanism. While transhumanism revolves around human evolution and transformation, for Transhumanists, the concept of the posthuman represents the pinnacle of human evolution.

Lee (2019) asserts that transhumanism represents not only the logical progression of human evolution but also a solution for ensuring the long-term survival of our species. Thus, before delving into the concept of post-human beings, it is vital to realize the fundamental principles of transhumanism, which involve transcending the biological

limitations of human existence, such as cognitive abilities, aging, and physical enhancement. By accomplishing these goals, Transhumanists perceive themselves as paving the way toward a future of posthumanism (Hogue 2006, 1). However, it is crucial to emphasize that transhumanism should not be mistaken as solely revolving around the pursuit of posthumanism<sup>16</sup>. To view transhumanism in such a narrow context would misrepresent its philosophical arguments and overarching goals.

Furthermore, transhumanism and posthumanism share a common aspiration for a future where biologically and technologically advanced beings replace homo sapiens (Hook 2019, 1). Both philosophies embrace the possibility and desirability of utilizing technology to significantly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities. While there are some differences between the two, they both engage with the concept of the post-human condition in the technological (Lemmens 2015). In fact, some scholars argue that post-humanism signifies a departure from traditional humanism and represents a new era, shaping a new understanding of what it means to be human. Essentially, post-humanism is a new mode of critical enquiry that positions itself in contrast to humanism, deeming the traditional idea as outdated (Roger and Hamilton-Mckenna 2023). Thus, both transhumanism and posthumanism are philosophical positions that advocate for reshaping the current human form towards something superior and improved. The divergence lies in the degree and perspective through which this transformation is envisioned. Nick Bostrom (2003c, 6), for instance, introduces the concept of "transhuman" as an intermediary stage between the human and the posthuman, highlighting the connection between the two.

### 3. Critiques of transhumanism

Since its inception, transhumanism has long been a subject of intense debate and criticism. Its worldview and precepts on human life have been vehemently criticized by its opponents. Consequently, the debate surrounding the biotechnological enhancement of human beings has a prominent place in the contemporary world. Notably, Francis Fukuyama (2004) has emerged as a prominent critic with his

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<sup>16</sup> These are simply confusable terms as Cennet (2012) acknowledges. The need to distinguish the two, however, does not mean that they are unrelated concepts.

influential essay. Fukuyama's work has established him as a significant figure among bio-conservatives, those who strive to preserve humanity in its natural state and oppose the concept of radical human enhancement through technological means (Bourgeois 2019). Bioconservatism,<sup>17</sup> as a term, encompasses those whose aim is to conserve humanity in its natural state and thus are opposed to the concept of human enhancement using radical technologies (Browne and Clark 2020). Simply defined, bio-conservatism is a term employed to describe those who fight against the ideas and postulates of transhumanists. The role of bioconservatives in the fight against transhumanism is not surprising, especially considering that Llano (2019) notes that, with biotechnology and the digital era, the humanist paradigm faces threats from posthumanism.

While Francis Fukuyama is widely recognized for labelling transhumanism as the most dangerous idea, the critics of this philosophical movement extend far beyond his assertions. Presently, criticisms against transhumanism permeate various academic disciplines and are prevalent in developed societies. These contentions arise from individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences, contributing to a multifaceted debate surrounding transhumanism. A. one writer aptly notes that "the debate against transhumanism is usually polarized, with one side embracing it uncritically and the other rejecting it irrationally" (The Partially Examined Life 2016). Thus, it becomes essential to approach these debates from two perspectives: acknowledging that not all arguments against transhumanism are thoroughly reasoned while recognizing that some criticisms present logically grounded and compelling viewpoints within the discourse.

To provide clarity and simplicity, this research identifies three primary categories of criticisms against transhumanism: Practical criticism, social criticism, and Ethical or Moral criticism. These classifications draw reference from Fukuyama's 2004 essay and other contemporary critics, often referred to as bioconservatives. However, it is crucial to note that this categorization does not claim to encompass an absolute and definitive portrayal of all arguments against transhumanism. Numerous other reasons exist within the anti-transhumanist standpoint. Nonetheless, the following represent some of the prominent criticisms prevailing in this discourse.

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<sup>17</sup> Bioconservatism is sometimes interchanged with the term Anti-Transhumanism or Conservatism.



### 3.1. *Practical criticism (viability and realism)*

When introduced to the concept of transhumanism and its agenda, it is natural for rational individuals to question the feasibility of this philosophy. Hence, in every rational human being, the first thing that comes into mind when one hears about the concept of transhumanism and its agenda, it is expected to question the viability of this philosophy. Consequently, opponents have voiced their objections primarily based on practical grounds, casting doubt on the achievability of Transhumanist goals. Istvan in an interview<sup>18</sup>, acknowledged that transhumanism is “usually associated with science fiction...” (Istvan 2016). Indeed, opponents usually argue that transhumanism is nothing but a scientific dream or utopian futuristic vision<sup>19</sup>. Fukuyama in his essay not only perceives transhumanism as a strange liberation movement but also writes that “it is tempting to dismiss transhumanists as some sort of odd cult, nothing more than science fiction taken too seriously...” (Fukuyama 2004, 42). Similarly, during the Nexus Conference, Wieseltier, vehemently disputed the postulates of Transhumanists, asserting that “it is enacted by humans, and someone has to make judgements we will never transcend” (Wieseltier 2018). Furthermore, Conley (2017), in his article critical of transhumanism, describes it as “a strange utopia”. But interestingly, Zoltan responded to this article, offering a defence of the transhumanist philosophy. His central counterargument was that “this article makes 3 factual errors”. Thus, this demonstrates that not all criticisms of transhumanism are accepted by its advocates as correct interpretations of the facts and reality of the transhumanism movement.

Moreover, the criticisms directed at transhumanism often revolve around the notion that it is a human endeavour, claiming to understand what is best for humanity. This underlying premise becomes a key flaw within the Transhumanist agenda. After all, if all

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<sup>18</sup> In an interview posted on the University of Sheffield news archive website on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2016 Professor Richard Jones debates the merits and faults of transhumanism with Zoltan Istvan, who at the time was running for the US Presidency under the Transhumanist banner. See the interview transcript at: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/zoltan>, (last accessed on Feb. 26, 2023).

<sup>19</sup> Others refer to transhumanism, based on its goals as, “an alleged dream of immortality”. The very usage of the word “dream” to describe this philosophical position undermines the essence of its agenda and shows that for some Transhumanism is merely a dream yet for Transhumanists it is a possibility to be experienced in the future. See, e.g., Pablo García-Barranquero (2021).

humans are inherently equal, as traditionally rooted in philosophy and law, why should one human accept another human's definition of what constitutes a fulfilling life? This is the puzzle that arises from the ideas put forth by Transhumanists. However, while questioning the feasibility of transhumanism is an obvious reaction in the confrontation of this philosophy, there is a need to shift focus from this stance to another more significant concern. In today's contemporary world, characterised by the rapid development of increasingly advanced technologies the central question should no longer revolve solely around the possibilities of transhumanism, whether it is feasible or not. This line of inquiry has become somewhat outdated and somewhat peripheral to the crux of the matter. Instead, critics should now turn their attention to examining the extent to which these ideas can be actualized and the potential implications they may entail.

Interestingly, despite many bioconservatives dismissing transhumanism as a mere scientific dream, they still perceive it as a significant threat to the natural order of things, the nature of humans. This observation suggests that transhumanism encompasses more than just a fanciful notion. Critics argue that Transhumanists fail to respect and acknowledge the inherent limitations of human beings, rendering their ideas impractical. According to Wieseltier (2018), human limitations should be recognized as obstacles to certain aspirations, thus rendering transhumanism illogical. Robert Frodeman, as cited by Waters (2020, 94), views transhumanism as a "defective understanding of human society and culture". However, from the perspective of Transhumanists, the agenda is to demonstrate that what is commonly perceived as human limitations is, in fact, illusory. They aim to showcase that human beings have the potential to transcend their current condition. Thus, the debate surrounding transhumanism delves into the notions of human limitations and whether they truly hinder human progress.

### 3.2. *Socio-legal criticism*

Apart from practical criticism, opponents of transhumanism also put forth social and legal arguments to challenge its principles. Bioconservatives argue that human enhancement would lead to social disparities, thus creating imbalances and legal inequalities. They contend that access to self-enhancement technologies would primarily be available to the affluent, thereby undermining equality. Fukuyama particularly asserts that equality will be the first victim of

transhumanism (Fukuyama 2004). His perspective portrays transhumanism as a project that could exacerbate social inequality and fundamentally alter the conventional concept of human nature, which emphasizes the notion of universal equality. Consequently, the era of transhumanism is predicted to widen the social gaps between different societal classes (Damayanti and Kenasri 2018). According to Fukuyama, the embrace of human enhancement would not only challenge social equality but also present legal dilemmas. He questions the rights that enhanced individuals would claim. Trivino (2015) suggests that the extent of physical enhancement may be so significant that equality between “normal” individuals and those who have undergone enhancement would cease to exist.

Generally, social concerns against transhumanism recognise that social gaps have always existed throughout history, particularly with the advent of technology, however, they argue that the acceptance of transhumanism would accelerate these gaps. This is because the goals being advocated for by Transhumanists do not appear attainable for impoverished societies, as they are primarily accessible to those who can afford the costs associated with human enhancement. Such an approach to life would undoubtedly challenge systems of social equality.

### 3.3. *Moral or ethical criticism*

Transhumanism not only faces criticism regarding its feasibility and the negative impact it may have on society, but it also encounters moral challenges. The debate surrounding the intersection of morality, science, and technology has long been central to societies since the advent of technology. However, the emergence of transhumanism as an audacious concept has heightened and intensified this debate, which is completely understandable. It is only natural to consider the ethical implications of technological advancements that have the potential to profoundly transform the human body and condition. Transhumanism goes beyond envisioning a future where technology plays a crucial role in human evolution; its vision is undeniably thought-provoking. In response to the moral and ethical objections raised against transhumanism, proponents of this philosophy have felt compelled to address these concerns to defend their beliefs. Nick Bostrom (2005, 1) writes that;

Transhumanism is emerging as the most promising alternative to conservative ethical systems that see human nature as something

that cannot or should not be changed, an attitude increasingly in tension with technological possibilities and people's legitimate desire to benefit from them.

Thus, transhumanists are aware of the clash between technological advancements and societal ethical values, which is why they make efforts to address these concerns in their advocacy for transhumanism. However, the concerns and debates surrounding the ethical implications of transhumanism continue to intensify. Despite this, transhumanists firmly believe that attempting to prohibit technological innovation based on ethical grounds would be misguided (Bostrom 2003b). According to Transhumanists, morality should not be seen as fixed or static, but rather as something that can evolve and adapt as humans make use of technology. Miller (2022) criticizes transhumanism as a dangerous dream and emphasizes the severe moral implications associated with it. Similarly, Taylor (2012) argues that transhumanism, by rejecting human nature and natural limitations, also rejects the inherent dignity of every human being.

Furthermore, the ethical concerns surrounding the use of technology to enhance the human body and condition are often influenced by religious and cultural beliefs. Within the Christian community, transhumanism has sparked a divide, with some viewing it as an attempt to replace God, while others embrace transhumanist ideas. A notable example of the latter is the Christian Transhumanist Association<sup>20</sup>, which explicitly supports the compatibility of Christian faith and transhumanism. The Christian Transhumanist Affirmation, for instance, acknowledges that "we recognize science and technology as tangible expressions of our God-given impulse to explore and discover and as a natural outgrowth of being created in the image of God"<sup>21</sup>. The association's three-fold mission<sup>22</sup> includes a commitment to viewing Christ's teachings as a guiding ethical vision for scientific and technological progress. Consequently, Christian Transhumanists maintain that science and faith can coexist harmoniously and contribute to a better future. However, despite such perspectives, concerns regarding the moral implications of transhumanism persist

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<sup>20</sup> According to its website, The Christian Transhumanist Association are "Christian Transhumanists who because of our commitment to our faith are also Transhumanist... We advocate a form of Transhumanism centred on Christ". See the website, <https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/about>.

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/affirmation/>.

<sup>22</sup> The Christian Transhumanist Association has three missions, that are, theological, faith-renewing, and technological missions.

and are a central focus of criticism from anti-transhumanist factions and certain religious figures.

#### 4. **Analysing transhumanism and the concept of international human rights**

Surprisingly, there is a scarcity of dedicated studies<sup>23</sup> examining the intricate relationship between transhumanism and the principles of international human rights. The interplay between these two concepts involves complex and dynamic issues that require an in-depth exploration. Throughout human history and societal advancement, the notion of human rights has undergone significant changes and evolution, largely influenced by technological advancements and contemporary societal transformations. Therefore, the concept of human rights has always been an evolving notion, however, the philosophy of transhumanism introduces profound implications for the framework of human rights. Transhumanism does not only challenge how human nature, body, and mind are understood but also raises fundamental concerns about human rights. Consequently, those advocating for the protection of human rights in the face of swift technological advances have legitimate concerns. The Human Rights Watch Organization, for example, highlights that technology while offering potential benefits, can also be utilized in ways that restrict rights and exacerbate inequality<sup>24</sup>.

This chapter aims to examine the relationship between transhumanism and human rights, with a focus on three main aspects. Firstly, it seeks to analyse whether Transhumanists base their advocacy on any established international human rights. Secondly, it aims to determine whether there is a right to self-enhancement within the context of transhumanism. Thirdly, if such a right does not currently exist, it aims to explore the potential implications and limitations for human enhancement. To address these questions comprehensively and explore the intricate dynamics between transhumanism and the human rights framework, this paper presents the following three key arguments.

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<sup>23</sup> See generally, Britta Van Beers (2022). See also, Uprenda Baxi (2009).

<sup>24</sup> See Human Rights Watch at <https://www.hrw.org/topic/technology-and-rights>.

#### 4.1. *Human rights are indirectly invoked to reshape the current human condition*

The relationship between transhumanism and human rights is deeply intertwined, albeit not always apparent or direct. However, upon examining Transhumanist literature and formulations, it becomes evident that there is a significant reliance on the principles of human rights within the advocacy for human enhancement. The very existence and coherence of Transhumanist philosophy and agenda rely on the foundational concept that all individuals possess inherent rights and freedoms. While there is no singular specific right that serves as a clear example of this reliance, it is based on a broad understanding of human rights. For instance, the Transhumanist Declaration, in Article 6 asserts that:

Policymaking ought to be guided by responsible and inclusive moral vision, taking seriously both opportunities and risks, respecting autonomy and individual rights, and showing solidarity with and concern for the interests and dignity of all people around the globe.

This demonstrates that transhumanism recognizes the significance of human rights as guiding principles. While the Transhumanist Declaration does not explicitly reference any specific international human rights, its tone and underlying ideas align with certain principles present in the international human rights framework. Thus, one can identify a general influence between transhumanism and international human rights. An example of this influence can be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United General Assembly 1948) where Article 1 states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act in a spirit of brotherhood". Based on this, it is evident that there exists an indirect connection between these two declarations. The nature and approach of transhumanism demonstrate a tendency to align with the concepts inherent in human rights, although certain limitations and incompatibilities exist.

Additionally, the Transhumanist Declaration, particularly in Article 8, emphasizes the importance of guaranteeing individuals' broad personal choices in shaping their lives. This aligns with the principles of freedom of expression, the right to self-determination, and bodily autonomy as understood within the international human rights framework. Furthermore, it reflects the fundamental principles of liberal democracy. It is perhaps due to this provision, among other

reasons, that Fukuyama (2004) refers to transhumanism as “a liberation movement.” Levin (2021) also highlights that decisions regarding self-enhancement and the extent to which one pursues it are matters of personal discretion. This retention of autonomy positions transhumanism squarely within the framework of liberal democracy. Therefore, it is evident that there is an intrinsic connection between transhumanism and the concept of humans as beings with rights and freedoms. While the compatibility between Transhumanist reliance on human rights and traditional notions of rights and freedoms may raise questions, it does not negate the fact of this reliance. The correlation between transhumanism and human rights cannot be entirely disconnected or disassociated, as the advocacy for personal choice and autonomy resonates with the core principles of international human rights discourse.

The foundation of Transhumanist ideas rests upon the principle of freedom of choice, which is not a novel concept within human rights discussions. Their philosophy emphasizes that transhumanism does not dictate preferences such as musical tastes, hobbies, marriage partners, or how one should live their life. It acknowledges that the usefulness of available human modification or enhancement options varies depending on individual circumstances and needs. From this perspective, one may question why they may not embrace the opportunity to enhance themselves using technology if it aligns with their desires and aspirations. Hence, this notion appears to be well within the realm of our contemporary understanding of human rights and freedoms. Examples from the contemporary world, such as the recognition of the right to sexual orientation and the fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation, illustrate the prevailing nature of expanding rights and freedoms. Transhumanists even argue that their philosophical approach builds upon social movements that have shaped society, including the suffragettes and feminism, the civil rights movement, and sexual and gender rights movements. Consequently, transhumanism is not distant from the principles of human rights. It aligns with the contemporary understanding of expanding rights and freedoms, emphasizing personal choice and building upon the progress achieved by various social movements.

The Transhumanism Manifesto presents an intriguing perspective that can be linked to the concept of human rights embraced internationally. It asserts, “I am the architect of my existence. My life reflects my vision and represents my values” (Vita-More 2020). This idea of self-determination and autonomy over one’s life and choices resonate with the discourse on human rights, particularly within the

framework of democracy and liberalism. However, it is crucial to acknowledge certain important aspects about transhumanism philosophy. While there is an implicit reliance on human rights within the advocacy for human enhancement, transhumanism presents a radical and selective interpretation of human rights. It does not align itself with the entire international understanding of human rights. The Transhumanism Manifesto explicitly states that it accepts certain behaviours as culturally influenced but rejects the notion of a universal human nature (Vita-More 2020). Despite this selectivity, Transhumanist advocates continue to rely on the existing universal conceptions of human rights in their pursuit of transhumanism. This presents a fundamental issue with transhumanism, that it is too individualistic to fully embrace the universal human rights framework based on a collective understanding of human beings. Transhumanism deviates from and goes beyond the essence of universal human rights. Consequently, those who champion human rights have valid reasons to oppose, protest, and challenge ideas that fragment and undermine the unity of humanity. Transhumanism, in its pursuit of radical individualism, betrays the essence of human rights instead of upholding and nurturing them. From a human rights perspective, it can be concluded that transhumanism has developed not to sustain the existing framework, but to diverge from and transcend its core principles.

#### 4.2. *A new set of rights is proposed to fully realise the new being (the enhanced man)*

Transhumanism represents a concept that seeks to revolutionize and modify the human condition by utilizing science and technology to overcome existing limitations. It introduces new perspectives on human life that challenge traditional notions of the human being and the essence of existence. Transhumanists argue for the evolution of both human and non-human rights through impartial decision-making, driven by the rapid advancement of information. Consequently, there is a strong advocacy for human enhancement through biotechnologies and other technological means, as well as a call for the recognition of new rights that align with the Transhumanist worldview.

Bostrom (2003c) emphasizes the need to protect the right of personhood, highlighting its significance in the Transhumanist agenda. Additionally, Transhumanists advocate for individual freedom, particularly the right for individuals to utilize technology to extend their



mental and physical capacities and enhance their control over their own lives. Consequently, empowering the individual lies at the core of the transhumanism movement, making it crucial for such rights to be acknowledged and safeguarded. Without the recognition and protection of these rights within the existing human rights framework, the advocacy of transhumanism would face significant obstacles.

The debated questions posed by Fukuyama (2004, 42) "What rights will they claim, and what rights will they possess compared to those left behind?" highlight a significant concern. The Transhumanist Bill of Rights serves as an illustrative example of an attempt to shed light on the rights that fit the transhumanist agenda. Article 4 of this bill declares that sentient entities, including genetically modified beings, have the entitlement to universal rights that encompass the cessation of involuntary suffering, the pursuit of personhood improvements, and the achievement of an indefinite lifespan through science and technology. The preamble of the bill further clarifies that "sentient entities" encompass various entities such as human beings, sentient artificial intelligences, cyborgs, and other advanced sapient life forms. This implies that these entities are entitled to rights within a posthuman society.

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the Transhumanist Bill of Rights has faced rigorous scrutiny and criticism. In his article, Smith (2018) argues that upon examining the document, it reveals itself as a "Bill of Wrongs" that undermines liberty. He perceives Transhumanism as not only authoritarian but also anti-human. Consequently, Smith concludes with a cautionary note, stating that transhumanism should be resisted by those who value natural rights and the genuine essence of human liberty.

#### 4.3. *Transhumanism is a movement about the rights of individuals, not essentially human rights in a collective sense*

The analysis conducted thus far has demonstrated a relationship between transhumanism and the concept of human rights, whether implicit or explicit. However, it is also evident that this relationship does not fully entail compatibility or resonance. Instead, it largely involves the manipulation of human rights to advance a new category of rights, which can be more appropriately termed "individual rights". Two primary reasons support the need to distinguish between these two concepts. Firstly, transhumanism aims to transcend the human form and ultimately propel humanity towards a post-human future. As such, labelling the enhanced beings as "human" would be a significant

misrepresentation. Secondly, the transhumanism movement predominantly revolves around the individual, advocating for rights that specifically pertain to those who choose to engage with transhumanist principles. For instance, at the core of transhumanism is the individual's right to freedom and self-realization through advanced technologies. Thus, this perspective is not concerned with communal accountability but rather seeks to transcend our inherent humanity.

Conversely, the notion of human rights encompasses broader considerations of humanity, human nature, and collectivism rather than being solely focused on individual rights. The international concept of human rights is based on the belief that all individuals possess inherent rights by virtue of being human. However, the advocacy of transhumanism deviates from this character, as it prioritizes individual interests over the collective understanding of human rights.

## Conclusion

This paper has provided a comprehensive understanding of transhumanism, tracing its historical origins, development, and current connotations. It has highlighted the widespread misconceptions surrounding transhumanism and emphasized the critical questions it raises. Indeed, the profound technological advancements in the contemporary world make the future of humanity increasingly uncertain and controversial such that transhumanism cannot be accepted without criticism. While transhumanism has many objectives, it is accurate to assert that its primary aim is to improve the human condition and shape a more 'humane existence', though its implications are far from simplistic. Transhumanism does not only challenge the essence of human existence and the core human values, but it radically aims at reconfiguring the conventional perception of humanity. Therefore, this paper contends that it is imperative not to dismiss the questions raised by transhumanism without thoughtful consideration of their consequences. The ambit of this paper, however, was not to determine the feasibility or attainability of transhumanist visions or goals but rather to bring attention to the questions that contemporary societies must grapple with. Specifically, the emergence of transhumanism and its potential integration into our reality raises significant concerns within the human rights paradigm.

Assessing the relationship between transhumanism and human rights this paper concludes that, despite transhumanists heavily drawing on the principles of international human rights, albeit

implicitly, the existing international human rights framework cannot be interpreted as embracing the right to self-enhancement through technology. Consequently, understanding the boundaries of current human rights and exploring the scope for personal evolution within the existing framework becomes of paramount importance. However, given the rapid advancements in technology and scientific studies, such a prospect remains a possibility for the future. Whether such a possibility leads to positive or negative outcomes remains uncertain, underscoring the need for a thorough evaluation of the transhumanist worldview. Therefore, further studies ought to be carried out to explain what happens to human rights in the face of transhumanism.

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