

## **Transhumanism and human enhancement – part 2**

### **Podcast notes and links**

New developments in human enhancement technology are running ahead of our ability to understand how to use it wisely for the good of humankind.

Techno-optimism is the underlying belief that technology will always improve our lives and our bodies and minds; it will make people better, smarter, healthier, happier, and more moral. Techno-optimism is an idea whose time has arrived. It is a feature of early 21<sup>st</sup> century thought which contrasts with the deep pessimism about the negative impact of science and technology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The “Yuck factor” is a spontaneous and intuitive negative psychological response to new technological initiatives. Although it is a fragile and malleable reaction it may reflect a deeper sense that limits to technological manipulation are necessary to protect the deeper creation order – what it means to be human.

### **Lego kits and flawed masterpieces**

If we regard the human body as a Lego kit, then there is no underlying order. All the pieces can be connected in any way we choose. The only limits to creation and manipulation are in our imagination.

But if the body is regarded as an artistic masterpiece which has become flawed by the consequences of the Fall, then our task is use to technology to restore the masterpiece where possible according to the original creator’s intention.

This leads to the distinction between *restorative* and *enhancing* interventions. Within this framework restorative interventions are morally appropriate whereas enhancing interventions are to be resisted because they are ‘changing the design’.

### **Human essentialism**

Is there an essential essence to being human? Is it possible to identify an ideal model of humanity? In orthodox Christian thinking Jesus is described as the Second Adam and the progenitor and model of a new form of humanity. If the original unenhanced kind of human body was good enough for Jesus then it’s good enough for me. I don’t need to have my body enhanced to be fully human, ‘human-as-God-intended-me-to-be’.

The Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus as a physical, touchable, recognisable human being represent God’s final vote of confidence in ‘original model’ human being. See Oliver O’Donovan *“Resurrection and Moral Order”*, IVP.

### **Divinisation**

A central doctrine of historic orthodox Christianity. God’s ultimate plan for human beings is not just salvation and redemption from sin, it is glorification (Romans 8: 17, 30; 2 Corinthians 3: 9-18). We will always be creatures; we will not and cannot share in the divine ‘substance’. But it seems that by God’s grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the capacities of our *pneumatikos* (spiritually energised) bodies will ultimately reflect the divine

capacities to the fullest extent that is possible for our created human natures. "...we shall be like him, because we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

The drive for human enhancement through technology may come in part from our created human nature, a deep human longing for ultimate glorification. What CS Lewis called the "Inconsolable Longing".

Is it possible that God is calling us to develop and enhance our humanity here and now through technology? For example, would it be appropriate to use technology (such as by manipulating our brain chemistry) to encourage human beings to become less aggressive and more collaborative?

In my view, although we might not want to exclude the possibility completely, the priority for the 2020s is to use human technology for restorative rather than enhancing purposes; to ensure that every human being on the planet has access to excellent restorative healthcare, before we consider the possibilities of technological human enhancement.

### **Further reading**

Article "The future of humanity" available on [johnwyatt.com](http://johnwyatt.com)

*Resurrection and Moral Order*, Oliver O'Donovan, IVP

*Transhumanism and Transcendence*, ed Ronald Cole-Turner, Georgetown University Press

*Modern technology and the human future*, Craig Gay, IVP

*Transhumanism and the image of God*, Jacob Shatzer, IVP

*Human enhancement*, ed Savulescu and Bostrom, Oxford University Press