Fears associated with human enhancement technologies: void or justified?

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Madam, the emergence of human enhancement technologies has taken the world with stride. Human enhancement technologies are techniques that can be used not only for treating illness but also for enhancing human characteristics and capacities.[1] Previously, therapy was the key of medicine. Now however, instead of simple restoration, we can enhance normal function and instigate new capacities that humans have never had before.[2-4] In spite of tremendous potential benefits, these technologies which include biotechnology, nanotechnology and cognitive sciences, have faced heavy criticism and are looked upon with daunting fears.

The most common fear associated with human enhancement technologies is that there might be an outburst of violence between the post-humans which are possible future beings whose basic capacities exceed those of usual humans,[5] and the present day humans. The post-humans might view the usual humans as inferior. On the other hand, the usual humans may feel threatened by post-humans and start killing post-humans before they themselves are killed or enslaved. This ultimately shapes human enhancement technologies as potential weapons of mass destruction.[6]

Although bioterrorism is indeed a severe hazard for our civilization, the therapeutic potential of human enhancement technologies should not be held hostage to such concerns. Reasonable people can consider stringent security measures against bio-weapons, while promoting beneficial medical uses of these technologies. To counteract negative tendencies, modern societies have created laws and endowed institutions with powers of enforcement that prohibit groups from enslaving or slaughtering one another. Similar laws could be enacted to ensure the appropriate use of human enhancement technologies.

Furthermore, objections based on the idea that there is something morally wrong in using science to engineer human nature are frequently surfacing. We need to realise that particular concerns about negative aspects of human enhancements technologies, even if legitimate, must be judged against their immense potential benefits.[2]

Every day that the introduction of human enhancement is delayed is a day of agony for many unfortunate victims of diseases that could have been forestalled. Being free from severe diseases would be as good as having a more efficient mind or a more combatable immune system. Human enhancement technologies are just another step in a long line of human advancement. In recognising the impracticality of trying to stop these technologies, we can re-focus our energies to a methodical analysis of their appropriate use. The goal should be to signify how the technologies will be developed and their individual, social, cultural, ecological, political, socio-economic, and evolutionary outcomes.

References

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