

Preface

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One of the most heated debates in bioethics is the debate over the enhancement of the human condition by biomedical means. Human enhancement means increasing human cognitive capacities (improving memory, raising intelligence), physical (increasing height, strength, life span) and mental (regulating the kind and intensity of emotions) which goes beyond the typical human level. The latter kind of biotechnological interventions may be applied, as some argue, to moral human enhancement which raises the most philosophical debate. In the debate over human enhancement one may distinguish two main opposite positions: post- or transhumanism and bio-conservatism. The former is in favor of promoting the enhancement of humankind, justifying an obligation or at least the permissibility of applying available knowledge and methods to the enhancement of the human condition. The latter gainsays the justification of biomedical enhancement of humankind, claiming that the aim of being a better person should rather be achieved through such means as education, deliberate and voluntary effort in shaping one's own judgments and attitudes. Neither of the afore-mentioned positions presents unified views leading to unambiguous conclusions. There are also some thinkers who are willing to agree on a third solution which aims at working out a compromise to allow a liberalized version of the transhumanistic project. It remains open as regards which conditions this variant would be possible and what dilemmas would it be necessary to challenge in order to realize it.

The present volume is entitled *Transhumanism* and includes miscellaneous articles which address the most crucial issues regarding the complex subject of human enhancement with reference to the most recent literature in the field. The considerations presented here expose a multitude and variety of perspectives from which the problem may be considered. The entire volume does not aim at exhausting the subject; nor is it a compendium of knowledge about the idea of transhumanism. It is rather an overview and critical analysis of the most recent ideas. The volume entitled "Transhumanism" begins with the classic essay of the same title, written by the biologist Julian Huxley, who should not be confused with his brother Aldous – the famous writer who was often regarded as a futurologist. In 1957 Julian Huxley published the essay in which he presented his hopes and postulates with regard to the idea of taking human evolution under control.

The essay is reprinted in this volume in its original form as well as appearing for the first time in Polish. Since being published the text has been used as a source of inspiration by many epigones of the idea of transhumanism. We use this essay as the equivalent of a further introduction to the miscellaneous considerations presented in this volume. Among the Authors contributing to this volume one can find philosophers, biologist, lawyers and sociologists. The articles published in the volume are both in Polish and English and it consists of three parts.

The first part of the volume entitled “The Idea of Transhumanism and Its Discontents” begins with the aforementioned essay by Huxley and consists of texts both critical and affirmative of Huxley’s idea in its different variants. The article by Adriana Warmbier discusses the critique of transhumanism based on the concept of moral agency; it is argued that the idea of moral human enhancement fails to justify the claim that biological enhancement may significantly affect the process of making moral choices. Marta Soniewicka concentrates on identifying the basic intuitions of skeptical approach to transhumanism in her article, arguing that they are rooted in a different philosophical tradition than the one to which transhumanists appeal to, resulting in fundamental disagreements between these two positions in the debate. Ivars Neiders analyzes in his essay the idea of post-persons introduced by Nicolas Agar, claiming that there are no conclusive reasons to rule out the possibility of moral status enhancement; yet Agar’s idea is based, according to the Author, on narrow assumptions of utilitarian ethic which ascribes universal relevance to such features as sentience and cognitive capacities. The Author of the next article, Wojciech Lewandowski, presents an elegant and subtle analysis of the argument from the *status quo*, according to which the reasons against human enhancement are not conclusive and proves the possibility of the interpretation of the bio-conservative view in which one may avoid the *status quo* bias objection. The Authors of the last essay in the first part, Urszula Kosielińska-Grabowska and Justyna Holocher, pose a question about the limits of morally acceptable human enhancement discussing the examples of bio-medically enhanced soldiers and sportsmen, and arguing that the acceptable limits depend on the nature of a given activity (social practice) – its function, and also moral and social significance.

The second part of the volume is entitled “Contemporary Challenges of the Biotechnological Age” and consists of five articles addressing the different aspects of biotechnology and its impact on human nature, human capacities and our understanding of the human being. The articles presented in this section pertain to the practical dimension of the debate about enhancement. One may find here reflections upon transhumanism in the context of current issues and challenges being discussed mainly in law, medicine, biology and cognitive science. Roberto F. Tibaldeo discusses Hans Jonas’ concept of the heuristics of fear - the cornerstone of his ethical system which concerns the

threats of technological advances. Fear is regarded here as something that prompts us to take our deeds into more careful consideration and thus it may lead to responsible action. Aiden Sisler analyses posthumanistic principles in the context of ecological justice. She expresses her support for a posthumanistic non-anthropocentric ethical approach. Błażej Kmiecik poses the question of whether "prenatal micro-surgery" which accompanies the pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, is a good method or not. He considers the moral aspect of the innovative technique that involves a third parent in creating an embryo. Beata Płonka emphasizes the distinction between the genotype and phenotype and discusses the problem of defining the scope of enhancing our physical and mental capacities. She argues that improving human capacities requires knowledge of the relation between genes and mental features. The author of the last text in the second part, Justyna Stanek, addresses the problem of the possibility of enhancing cognitive capacities by applying innovative devices such as brain-computer interfaces. She examines the benefits and disadvantages which may emerge while using Google Glass.

The volume ends with the final part in which two reviews of books are presented. The first one, written by Marta Soniewicka, is a review of the book by F. M. Kamm entitled *Bioethical Prescriptions: To Create, End, Choose, and Improve Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Kamm is a distinguished American analytical thinker, the author of works in the field of moral philosophy and political philosophy. In the reviewed book she addresses bioethical issues, including the problem of human enhancement; she objects to the arguments given by Michael Sandel against the idea and defends the claim that one is obliged to guarantee the genetic makeup of its progeny to a certain level. The second one, written by Krystian Szadkowski, is a review of the book by Richard Münch entitled *Academic Capitalism. Universities in the Global Struggle for Excellence* (New York, London: Routledge 2014). The book concerns the problem of academic excellence and competition among universities in the light of conditions for the commercialization and commodification of higher education.

Some of the papers included in the volume were previously presented at the conference entitled "Interdisciplinary Accounts to Subjectivity", organized at the Institute of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University, and at the seminar entitled "Human enhancement", organized at the Faculty of Law and Administration of the Jagiellonian University. Both events took place in October 2014, as part of projects funded by the Polish National Science Centre; and most of the Contributors to the volume participated in both of them. These events inspired us to work on the present volume concerned with the topic. We would like to thank Professor Ewa Nowak for giving us the opportunity to publish this volume. We owe special thanks also to the publishing company Peters Fraser & Dunlop, in particular to Ms. Sharon Rubin, for the permission to reproduce the essay of Julian Huxley and the

permission for its Polish translation which was granted for free. Because of the growing interest in the subject of human enhancement, the subsequent volume of *Ethics in Progress* will include further considerations and responses to the issues presented in this volume. We hope you enjoy reading them!

Cracow, 18 May 2015

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Introduction

Abstract. The hereby introduction gives an insight into the topics and themes discussed in the hereby presented issue of the journal *Ethics in Progress*, devoted to the topic of transhumanism in its numerous contexts.

Keywords. Transhumanism, human enhancement,

Ethics in Progress (ISSN 2084-9257). Vol. 6 (2015). No. 1. pp. 07-11.

doi: 10.14746/eip.2015.1.1