

Technological Body Enhancement; Nyantakyi; Short Paper No. 1

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A Discussion on the Ethics of Technological Body Enhancement

Once thought to be the product of imaginative science fiction, transhumanism, the addition of technological enhancements to the human body, has evolved to become very much a concept of the present. Advancements in technology have opened the door to a multitude of body modifications beyond artificial limbs, including bionic ears sensitive to air pressure, wireless cameras installed in the eyes or even brain machine interfaces that allow people to move devices with their brains. The greater push for bodily enhancement leads to several ethical questions regarding who should be using these methods and how these devices should be distributed.

Technological bodily modification is typically performed for one of two reasons: either as a means to aid or work around disabilities, or to push human capabilities further, sometimes with the goal of competing with or surpassing artificial intelligence. The lines blur slightly in the cases of enhancements that may indirectly address a disability, such as a color-blind man had an antenna installed that interprets colors as auditory vibrations. Nevertheless, there is debate regarding whether it is ethical for people to participate in elective technological augmentation surgeries, especially in cases that require replacing healthy, functioning limbs in exchange for bionic limbs. Moreover, many ask: Is it ethical to use elective enhancements for social gains such as using bionic limb replacements to win an Olympic medal? And furthermore, what happens if this is closed off to only people who can afford it? Transhumanist advocates state that in the future, these devices will become as common place as smartphones, and hopefully cost next to

nothing. However, the current environment of the U.S Healthcare system, and the present-day costs of high-tech body enhancements, raise questions about how to address costs in the context of wealth inequality today.

This issue is interesting because it intertwines issues of distributive justice with autonomy. While the technological enhancements are goods that can be distributed, the ultimate decision over whether to make those a part of one's body, remains a personal decision. I am of the opinion that people should be able to do what they want with their bodies. However, I think in their current form, technological body enhancements should only be considered for people with disabilities until these augmentations are at low enough costs that they are accessible to more than just the wealthiest people. I think it is better to shift the focus onto helping those who need it by keeping the attention on the development of devices that help people with disabilities navigate our world more easily. Issues of equity are concerned with eliminating socially unjust health disparities rather than widening them. As a result, we should work on leveling the playing field first before catering to and possibly aiding in the development of a new class of elite financially and biologically advantaged people. I fear that with the needs of extremely wealthy, able-bodied people taken too highly into consideration, technologists might favor the more superficial desires over the improvement and development of disability aid devices. Also, considering that extremely wealthy people are likely to both fund research and buy more expensive devices, prioritizing their needs could snowball into a cycle of developing only the most expensive devices that do not really cater to disabilities at all, but advance able-bodied and wealthy. As a result, I believe it is more ethical task to allocate resources for technological bodily advancements to those who need them most. In our current society that is most easily navigated

by able-bodied individuals, I believed disabled individuals should be completely prioritized in development and allocation of technological bodily enhancements.

I am aware that a disparity may also exist between disabled people who can afford these technologies and those who cannot. This is an already existing issue, exacerbated by the U.S healthcare system and truly overcoming this disparity would require addressing overarching issues of healthcare costs and income inequality. Aside from costs, are additional questions regarding people's right to engage in elective surgeries specifically for the sake of surpassing the capabilities of a healthy human body. Some ethicists argue that these elective bodily modifications are no different from the natural spread of advantages and disadvantages in the world of sports and beyond. They say that this is no different from the advantage of having trained one's entire life for a sport or being born with lungs that naturally have a greater capacity for air. To this, I actually believe that there is a difference between the use of technological advancement and the occurrence of nature or extensive training.

One major feature of Artificial Intelligence is its infinite nature in terms of knowledge, productivity, life-span and more. As these technologies advance, we are no longer comparing our functional abilities to the baseline of human capabilities, we are comparing them to the infinite capabilities of machines. One example of a productivity maximizing effort is Elon Musk's Brain Machine Interface (BMI). Musk's company, Neuralink, aims to create a device that implants into the brain and allows people with disabilities that limit the control of their bodies, to be able to control devices that could help them undergo certain tasks. While this device can allow disabled individuals to access a brand-new range of actions, there is also discussion about people without a specific need for them using BMIs. Their goal is to utilize chips that improve memory, data

analysis and calculation to skyrocket productivity, putting them on-par with the capabilities of artificial intelligence.

It is important to remember that the desire to maximize a perceived social value is not universal. The idea that everyone would jump at the chance to use technological bodily advancements is not entirely accurate. In reality, there is a wide range of people who prioritize different things when it comes to living their lives. Self-proclaimed cyborgs have created a subculture of elective body modifications while some members of the deaf community reject cochlear implantation devices and prefer to remain immersed in the rich culture of established by the deaf community. Autonomy allows people to make these choices as they see fit. Still, there is an undeniable social pressure that may appear in contexts such as hiring for productivity dependent jobs, where those who do not choose or cannot afford such procedures may face a new layer of workplace discrimination. Additionally, it may be more difficult to address this as discrimination when such procedures are framed as a choice. I would like to engage with more research about how developers such as those at Neuralink plan to address these ethical concerns. In addition, I would like to gain more understanding about the public's reception of these enhancements through consulting observational studies.

The ethical questions surrounding transhumanism mimic many of the social concerns we have today. Despite the familiarity of these issues, it is important not to fall into previous mistakes that have encouraged or exacerbated inequity in other systems. Instead, I think this presents an opportunity to think forward and anticipate future problems that may arise. I acknowledge the importance of not rejecting progressive developments outright, and I believe we can find a balance between maintaining justice and reaching new heights of human capabilities.

