Transhumanism (h+) *vis-à-vis* African Holism: A Theological Response for a Teleological Ethic

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Abstract

Transhumanism (h+) is a social and philosophical movement that looks to enhance human cognitive and physiological conditions by developing technology to improve human health and extend human life, leading to a digital version of eternal life on a virtual platform. Considerable research from neuroscience, technology, the sciences, philosophy, and ethics has been ploughed into Transhumanism and related fields. Although there are some Christian voices from the West, such as Fazale Rana and John Lennox, there are few Christian voices from Africa addressing the Transhumanist concern. The traditional African philosophy of holism together with a biblical-theological response may help us identify the dangers of this movement. The research findings provide a framework for constructing a teleological ethic for an emerging Transhumanist context in Africa. This paper employs as its research methodology a modified Architectonic Theology which includes the following: (1) exploring the Transhumanist project, both historical and present; (2) exploring the traditional African philosophy of holism in relationship to Transhumanism; (3) exploring Christian theology in response to Transhumanism; and (4) constructing a teleological ethic for Transhumanism given African holism and the biblical-theological response. This paper will empower African Christianity with a biblical-theological response to the emerging Transhumanist project that is not only contextual to African thought but also relevant for all. Furthermore, it will give Africa a critical voice in a global movement.

Introduction

Transhumanism (h+)[1] is not science fiction, nor is it a future reality. Although it is early days, it is already here. Transhumanism is considered "an intellectual and socio-political movement", and seeks to enhance the human being by encouraging the use of enhancement and bio-transformative technologies that in time will radically alter the human being, creating a post-human species (Porter 2017: 237–238). It argues that human nature is not a fixed concept, thus the prefix, "trans", and the abbreviation (h+). According to Transhumanism, humanity must take charge of its evolutionary process by employing reason and technology not only to help those who suffer from physical injury, deformity, or any kind of handicap but also so that they can transcend and break free from their bodies (Oesch 2020:24). The concept of Transhumanism is ancient. A 3000-year-old piece of Transhumanist technology was discovered in ancient Egypt: a sophisticated prosthetic wooden toe, together with a strap that allowed for movement. The artificial limb is said to have belonged to a daughter of a priest. (Strickland 2017).

The concerns of Transhumanism are numerous, and conservatives, especially conservative Christians like myself, ought not to respond in thoughtless knee-jerk reactions. Instead, they ought to highlight the common ground between Christianity and technology and medical science, and offer a mitigated response that is compassionate towards those who are suffering and may benefit from human enhancement technology to alleviate suffering or handicaps (Rana 2019: 21). These are complicated realities that deserve an urgent response from the Christian church together with biblical-ethical considerations (Oesch 2020:13). This paper offers a theological response to Transhumanism (h+) *vis-à-vis* African holism that will help develop a teleological ethic.

Employing a modified Architectonic Theology (Falconer 2019), I first provide an overview of the Transhumanist project, its ancient origins and contemporary figures, along with a working definition of Transhumanism. From there I explore an unlikely dialogue partner, African holism. This will help us understand the complexities of humanity in light of Transhumanism. Of

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[1] From here on (h+) will not be included at every mention of Transhumanism.

most importance for the church is the theological response. The theological response includes a discussion of those Transhumanist ideologies that share common ground with the Christian faith, which in turn leads to a discussion on Christian Transhumanism. After this, I discuss the embodied resurrection which, in my view, provides the ultimate answer to Transhumanist goals. Using a biblical-theological response as my foundation and African holism as a guide, I offer a teleological ethic for the future of the Transhumanist project.

The Transhumanist (h+) Project

The seed of the Transhumanist project is found in ancient Greek mythology when the Titan god, Prometheus, took clay and fashioned humanity. Afterwards, he took fire from the gods and handed it to humankind in the form of knowledge, technology, and civilization (Porter 2017:242; Herold 2016:19). More recently, contributions from English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon (1561–1626), German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900), and English evolutionary biologist and eugenicist Julian Huxley (1887–1975) have been seminal for the Transhumanist movement. Today, influential Transhumanists include, among others, computer scientist and futurist Ray Kurzweil, who is famous for his book *The Singularity Is Near*, philosophers and futurists Max More and Nick Bostrom, and Swedish researcher and Transhumanist Anders Sandberg.

The Israeli historian and public intellectual Yuval Noah Harari, although not himself a Transhumanist, has written at length about Transhumanism in his book, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (Harari 2017). Harari explores the future of humanity, its dreams and projects, as well as the nightmares that may haunt our horizon. Although he is not entirely convinced by all Transhumanism has to offer and expresses numerous concerns in his book, Harari is not entirely opposed to the idea either (Curran 2017:24).

Transhumanist sub-projects include artificial intelligence and artificial life which we are in the first stages of developing and creating. Overcoming death is another transhumanist goal into which funding and research have also gone.

Harari believes that we can influence the direction of our future by employing new technologies, yet old values such as equality and freedom will still guide

our moral compass. In my view this is optimistic because it says that humans and machines can unite in a kind of marriage where those humans who wholeheartedly embrace the Transhumanist project and upgrade themselves will, at best, treat traditional humans with inferiority. Harari says that the gap will be larger than the gap between neanderthals and homo sapiens. Already we are seeing the initial stages of the collapse of democracy and the free market, and a shift from the individual to computed algorithms. The future, Harari argues, is not *homo sapien* (wise man) but *homo deus* (man-god)*.* In other words, humans will be upgraded into demigods (Curran 2017:23). Harari highlights concerns, especially the notion of humanity losing their human identity. The Transhumanist (h+) project, according to Harari's vision, is not a Christian one, nor is it one that is grounded in any of the Abrahamic faith traditions. Rather, it is inspired by paganism, a claim with which Christian Transhumanists would disagree. Once we become transhuman, we will become gods, albeit, fallible gods, like those of the ancient Greek pantheon. For Harari, God is dead, there is no transcendent god, and neither are there souls. These are said to be outdated concepts. So, if asked whether God exists, Harari might answer, "Not yet." Instead, "organisms are algorithms," therefore, there is no intrinsic meaning or purpose in our universe, according to Harari (2017; Curran 2017:23–24).

Herold (2016:19) explains that the word, "transhuman" was coined by Julian Huxley, the brother of the English writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley. Huxley believed the human beings would transition from human to the next stage of their evolution. That being he called" posthuman."

Transhumanism seeks to overcome human limitations, like the body and its physical restrictions, disease and physical illness, aging, cognitive capacities, life span, and so on (Oesch 2020:24; Sweet 2015:360; Waters 2011:165; Campbell 2006:64). Think of it as three superpowers, says Oesch (2020:28): "super-longevity, super-intelligence, and super-well-being." These will be achieved by employing "enhancement technologies" to launch humanity into its next evolutionary phase (Shatzer 2021:134; Oesch 2020:26; Rana 2019:15). Such enhancement technologies include genetic engineering, pharmaceutical drugs, nanobots, neuro implants, bionic replacements for poorly functioning

body parts,[2] and cybernetic augmentations for our physical, emotional, and psychological composition (Curran 2017:23; Herold 2016:15). And so, as Herold (2016:15) proclaims, the "line between 'human' and 'machine' will become progressively more blurry." Transhumanists want to control our evolutionary process and enhance human potential by transforming and redesigning human nature[3] (Sweet 2015:360).

O'Connell (2017:17) explains that Transhumanism is considered a liberation movement, freeing itself from biology itself. But on the other hand, it is a "total enslavement to technology." Here we need to keep in mind that there are two terms, Transhumanism and Posthumanism. Transhumanism is the present transition towards the goal of posthumanism where our psychosomatic persons are replaced by a non-organic body (Kraftchick 2015:48), either as a robotic machine (think cyborg) or in virtual space. Either way, our minds, and even our consciousnesses will be uploaded into a non-biological brain-computer interface (BCI). Here we begin to see the overlap of artificial intelligence (AI) with Transhumanism (Rana 2019:102, 105; O'Connell 2017:32; Porter 2017:239; Kraftchick 2015:52; Tirosh-Samuelson 2012:717). They are separate projects, but they are related and may merge in the future. This is called the "singularity", the moment technology fuses with "human consciousness and artificial intelligence" (Curran 2017:25; Kurzweil 2006). Tirosh-Samuelson (2012:717) says that for Ray Kurzweil, the "uploading of ourselves into a human-made machine is the spiritual goal of Transhumanism since it promises transcendence and even immortality. While the body, the hardware of the human-computer, will die, the software of our lives, our personal 'mind file,' will continue to live on the Web in the posthuman future where holographic avatars will interact with other bodiless posthuman entities."

For now, Transhumanism is the "merging of humanity with technology as the next stage of our human evolution," according to Campbell (2006:62). He explains that technology is the tool that will help us overcome our biological

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[2] Herold (2016: 18) tells us, "Already in use or in development is an array of artificial organs, including hearts, kidneys, pancreases, lungs, retinas, and parts of the brain."

[3] This paper is not advocating evolution, theistic evolution, or any other evolution-creation view. It merely presents the views of Transhumanism, which adhere to some variation of Darwinism.

limits, improve our physical condition, and lengthen our lives (Campbell 2006:61).

Technocrats, specialist medical doctors (like neuroscientists), computer and robotic engineers, scientists, and philosophers are already working toward the future of humanity's existence (Kraftchick 2015:50). Such an existence may be considered posthuman. The irony is that while "Posthumanism is a new vision of humanity" (Campbell 2006:63), it not only redefines humanity but also transcends it, replacing it with something quite different (Sweet 2015:361). As Tirosh-Samuelson (2012:715) laments, this may lead to the "delinking (of) sex and reproduction and seek the self-destruction of the embodied human."

Curran (2017:23) explains that Transhumanists are "children of the Enlightenment, with its optimistic view of human progress. They believe that developments in science and technology will soon make possible the radical transcendence of human biological, cognitive, and emotional limitations, and the evolution of a posthuman race, even the attainment of immortality." Transhumanism makes use of "humanist values such as rationality, personal autonomy, and so on," says Porter (2017:238). Further, Transhumanists have the conviction that they can and indeed must control human evolution using technology (O'Connell 2017: 10) and that humans have the moral right to extend life and upgrade human cognitive and physiological capabilities (Campbell 2006:64). The principle of Transhumanism is to improve our works, to make humanity better, to eliminate suffering. Consequently, along with O'Connell (2017:10), who is not a Transhumanist, we should at the very least be sympathetic towards this cause, despite so many ethical, social, and religious concerns.

African Holism

Few African scholars have engaged with Transhumanism, and yet it is a global movement. African philosophy offers a unique response to Transhumanist ideals that need to be taken into careful consideration. Before supplying a theological response to Transhumanism, I will explore the contributions that African holism can make to the Transhumanist dialogue.

Turaki (2006:32) explains that holism is an African philosophical concept that "life is more than the sum of its parts," yet each part has a function and exists in "a state of complex interdependency." Further, he says that the boundaries between the material world and the spiritual world are blurred, that is, nature and human beings exist in a fluid, but coherent unity with the spiritual world (Turaki 2006:32). As Mburu says, the spiritual world is more real to the traditional African than our physical world. This is why life's questions usually "have a spiritual answer." (Mburu 2019:33). She argues that this is like the biblical worldview where the physical and spiritual realities exist together in God's creation, and spiritual beings are very active around us (Mburu 2019:34). Accordingly, Turaki (2006:34) explains that the traditional African sees life as full of supernatural possibilities.

As mysterious as life is, it is not a collection of fragmented parts. Everything exists as an integrated whole, according to Turaki, speaking of African holism. African holism does not recognize a separation between the secular and the sacred, which is why living in harmony and balance in everyday life promotes peace with one's community and the spirit world (Turaki 2006:33). Lajul (2017:26) explains holism best when he says that "African metaphysics takes the knowledge of reality as a totality, regardless of whether this reality is material or immaterial, seen or unseen, mundane or celestial, human or non-human, living or non-living."

In addition to belonging to a community, the traditional African also belongs to their creator, God, sometimes called the Supreme Being.[4] Human dignity is rooted in the notion that one is not created by oneself but by God, which gives meaning to the sacredness of human life (Ajedokun 2015:143).

The African community also facilitates another kind of holism. African scholars agree that one achieves personhood through social relationships and interaction. But it is more than simply participating in a community, it is about making a positive contribution by promoting well-being and the common good—benefiting others in their community (Molefe 2019:315–316, 320; Lajul 2017:31). Ikuenobe (2015:1008) explains that the social responsibility of all the

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[4] This discussion is not going to explore the African concept of God, and whether it is the same as the Judeo-Christian God or not. For now, I mean a generic deity that shares some characteristics with the Judeo-Christian God.

members of the community is mutual and equal. Of course, that is not to say that there are no social hierarchies like chiefs, patriarchs, and intermediaries. This notion of social responsiblity is consistent with the familiar *Ubuntu* meaning, "I am because we are." *(Umntu ngumntu ngabantu* [Xhosa]). In other words, a person is a person through other persons. According to Ajedokkun (2015:137), the cultural values of Africans help guide "the role and function of the individual living within the African community."

However, as Ikuenobe (2015:1005) argues, even though the African understanding of personhood is that it is integrated into the community, this does not necessarily negate human autonomy. On the one hand, the individual is embedded in their "social environment, culture, or tradition that indicates value commitments, social obligations, interpersonal relationships, and mutual dependencies." (cf. Igbafen 2017:252; Ikuenobe 2015:1005). On the other hand, the individual is autonomous only as far as their social identity and cultural standards defined by their specific community direct their values and actions. In other words, while they have free will, their personality, and choices are shaped by the community from which they come (Ikuenobe 2015:1006, 1011). One might call this form of autonomy, "relational autonomy" (Ikuenobe 2015:1007). So, while an African is a person, they are beyond their individuality, says Ikuenobe (2015:1007). He sums it up succinctly as follows, "The community involves a set of values, traditions, interests, and complex relationships that transcend individuals or their collectivity the individual self is defined by, integrated into, and constituted in the community by the organic processes of acculturation, socialization, moral education, and ritual integration." (Ikuenobe 2015:1010).

Although Sweet (2015) is not writing on African community or holism, his reflections on Transhumanism and the metaphysics of the human person are salient to this discussion. He argues that Transhumanism dissolves human and personal identity, firstly by blurring the distinguishing marks of personal characteristics that distinguish one person from another, and secondly by diminishing shared communal characteristics (Sweet 2015:362). There is no recognition in the Transhumanist movement of the relationship between human beings as a fundamental part of what it means to be human (Sweet 2015:363).

Transhumanism also views the human as a duality; the body is a commodity that is distinct from the human person, implying that the person may be separated from their body (Sweet 2015:363). Human beings are also embodied beings who "exist and relate to one another so far as they are material beings." In other words, we are embodied persons who relate to others through our bodies (Sweet 2015:365, 370). The Transhumanist view is contrary to African holism, and in my view, a biblical anthropology, namely dualist holism (or psychosomatic holism). Sweet states that the body "is not merely an instrument through which relations occur or activities are engaged in. The body is 'integrated 'with what it is to be a human person. And it is because of this integration that the human person is said to be a 'whole.'" (Sweet 2015:365). Transhumanism fails to consider that humans are social creatures who participate as members of communities where we grow and develop in morals, language, self-awareness, social behavior, customs, codes, and so on. All these are part of what makes us human persons (Sweet 2015:367). The Transhumanist project seeks to employ technology to improve the human condition. Yet, one needs to ask whether this is an improvement if the human virtues of accomplishment and the process of achieving moral, intellectual, and spiritual development that contribute to human personality are diminished.

However, the traditional African view of the community has been romanticized, especially in contemporary Africa, because globalization has fostered a "culturally pluralistic and interconnected global society." (Ajedokun 2015:138). This means that the modern African city dweller has lost some of their sensibilities towards their traditional African community whereby their personhood has adopted different moral and cultural guides, namely those produced by colonialist values, urbanization, and modern thought and lifestyles (Ikuenobe 2015:1014). It is not difficult to see that Sweet's reflections on community, though Western, address African concerns, which suggests that African holism may be quite relevant to Western sympathies as well as to contemporary urban Africa where globalization is prevalent—even more reason for Africans to engage with Transhumanism.

A fascinating dialogue has taken place between two Nigerian philosophers, Ademola Kazeem Fayemi, a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Johannesburg, and Amara Esther Chimakonam, a doctoral student at the same

university. Both are researchers in Bioethics in Africa and African philosophy.[5] Fayemi's article was titled, "Personhood in a Transhumanist Context: An African Perspective." Chimakonam's "Transhumanism in Africa: A Conversation with Ademola Fayemi on his Afrofuturistic Account of Personhood" offers her confutation to Fayemi.[6]

Consistent with the African community, Fayemi acknowledges that "personhood in Yoruba culture (Nigerian) is defined primarily through other persons and other secondary but complementary qualitative capabilities such as will and social functionality." Fayemi agrees that Transhumanism may conflict with traditional values and beliefs and with the African perception of personhood. Yet, he "defends an Afrofuturistic account of personhood that is compatible with some censored essentials of Transhumanism in African thoughts." After all, Transhumanism also confers personhood via technology, says Fayemi (2018:55). Science and technology are employed by Transhumanism to improve humanity's condition. The objective of this "intellectual, cultural, and technological commitment" is to make human beings *more* human by "transcending our biological limitations." (Fayemi 2018:62).

Fayemi (2018:71) holds that Africa may well embrace Transhumanism, especially if it is able solve some of painful realities that so many Africans experience every day. Yet, he is aware of the public health and economic challenges in Africa. Although Fayemi wishes to see the protection of African personhood, as well as the enhancement of humanity's condition, he suggests that Transhumanist technology needs to be appropriated slowly, and in piecemeal fashion. Transhumanism will realize true personhood, according to Fayemi (2018:72), "by providing platforms for increased capacity of appreciating life in all its dimensions." This suggests that personhood would not be negatively affected, especially if the Transhumanist project can learn from "African moral and metaphysical conceptions of personhood." (Fayemi 2018:72). Feyemi (2018:73) concludes,

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[5] Their academic credentials were current at the time they published their articles.
[6] The two scholars have also co-authored papers together.

Africa, in the face of its mountainous challenges, needs to key into the Transhumanist scheme. In appropriating Transhumanist ideas and products in Africa, Africans can rarely afford to be mere end-users of therapeutic and enhancement technologies of the world; efforts should be stepped-up in being active participants in the production of ideas and knowledge in the Transhumanist age. African states can, and do have a duty to, transform the human condition for the better by embracing technologies that not only promote personhood but also have potential of making humans more humane.

I appreciate Fayemi's awareness of some of Africa's challenges, his concerns about personhood, and his eagerness for Africa to make a significant contribution to a global movement. Yet I find his argument that Transhumanism's is able to enhance personhood and make humans even more human is naïve, particularly when the integration of technology with biology could diminish human personhood and humanity itself. One need only look at social media and the global crises of loneliness and lack of authentic and embodied community to see this danger. I am not alone in my criticism. In her response to Fayemi, Chimakonam (2021:43), agrees that "the technological enhancement of personhood would increase the relational capacity of individuals and better situate them to contribute to the common good." Yet, she rightly, in my view, opposes the idea that "Transhumanism is compatible with the Afro-communitarian normative concept of personhood." This" casts doubt on the permissibility of Transhumanism from an Afro-communitarian stance." (Chimakonam 2021:43).

Chimakonam (2021:50) argues that it is the level of an individual's adherence to the norms of their community and their responsibilities that develops and enriches one's personhood. Transhumanism, on the other hand, radicalizes the acquisition of personhood by taking it out of the hands of the community and putting it in the cold clinical hands of technology. By so doing, she argues, the value Africans place on personhood will be eliminated, because the process by which one attains "personhood is ultimately eliminated by the genetic compulsion to always do good." (Chimakonam 2021:52). In other words, moral responsibility would terminate in "such a technologized

personhood." (Chimakonam 2021:53). This, of course, also raises the question of human free will, another important topic in African philosophy (or any philosophy for that matter). In her conclusion, Chimakonam (2021:53) writes,

> Fayemi's Afrofuturistic Transhumanist future provides grounds to doubt the permissibility of Transhumanism in Africa. The technological enhancement of human behaviour would then be morally objectionable in so far as it waters radicalizes [sic] the normative conception of personhood. This radicalization would be in the form of a radical change from normative personhood, where individuals strive to achieve personhood and succeed or fail at it, to technologized personhood, where personhood would be technologically engineered.

Transhumanism: A Theological Response

In the previous discussion, I looked at African holism and demonstrated how it offers a critique of Transhumanism. In this discussion, I will offer a biblical-theological response to Transhumanism. This response is not a supplement to the contribution of African holism. Instead, it takes the discussion further, beyond the limits of human philosophy. After all, Scripture and theology have the last word when it comes to a Christian response.

Many Christian theologians take issue with Transhumanism's view of anthropology, personhood, and their poor understanding of transcendence (Tirosh-Samuelson 2012:718). Nevertheless, that does not mean that there is no common ground between Transhumanism and Christianity; there certainly is. Subsequently, this has become the seedbed for the Christian Transhumanist Association, which encourages "using science & technology to participate in the work of God—to cultivate life and renew creation." (Christian Transhumanist Association 2023).

There is much that Christians can commend in Transhumanism. Transhumanists and Christians agree that the world is not as it should be and needs to be redeemed. However, Christian theologians argue that our present condition is the result of humanity's corruption; for the Transhumanist, the

world is broken because of our limited mortal condition, our unablility to reach our full potential (Oesch 2020:211; Waters 2011:164). While Christians seek transformation "by their life with Christ," Transhumanists seek it "through technological transformation." (Waters 2011:164). Both wish to see the removal of evil, sickness, suffering, and death. Both hope for a renewed creation, even if each one's final vision looks different from the other. Traditionally, Christians have been pioneers in starting hospitals and caring for the sick and so support medical research to "promote human flourishing and alleviate human suffering" (Rana 2019:204). Christians and non-believers have worked together in medicine and technology and should continue to do so (Oesch 2020:211).

Both Christians and Transhumanists perceive death as an enemy of humanity (Oesch 2020:214; Waters 2011:164). Transhumanists look to overcome death by using technology "to extend life indefinitely, provide unlimited knowledge, and give its adherents total bliss." Christianity, on the other hand," teaches about eternal life (super-longevity) in which all of God's designs will be made known (super-intelligence) in a state where fear or sadness no longer exist (super-well-being)." Transhumanists rely on their creative power and technology, while Christians look to the truly transcendent God and his promises of a glorious, embodied resurrection (Oesch 2020:44–45). According to Rana (2019:23), Transhumanists also look for transcendence and immortality, but this transcendence is not found in an external deity, but in us. They argue that this is to be unlocked and cultivated by science and enhancement technology.

There is common ground between Christians and Transhumanists, despite significant differences. Both believe that we need to continue with caution and careful reflection as we develop an ethical framework that is caring and just, explains Campbell (2006:71), but as he reminds us, continuation must not be at humanity's expense. This too is my greatest concern.

Cole-Turner (2015:20) reckons that those who oppose Transhumanism are hopeful that Christians will put an end to the Transhumanist project. The problem he says is that Transhumanism is a Christian idea. In my view, such Christians see more in common with Transhumanism, than they ought. Enter the world of Christian Transhumanism. According to the Christian

Transhumanist Association website, a Christian Transhumanist is "Someone who advocates using science & technology to transform the human condition—in a way consistent with, and as exemplified by, the discipleship of Christ." (Christian Transhumanist Association 2023; Shatzer 2021:134–135).

Curran (2017:25) believes that human enhancement technology may serve *some* of God's purposes and that Christians can employ technology to extend life, improve family and community life, and contribute to overall human flourishing. Yet, he also acknowledges that the Transhumanist concept of "absolute physical immortality contradicts Christian teaching about our ultimate destiny." (Curran 2017:25). Mercer (2015:30) pushes this further, arguing that Christians may embrace Transhumanist ideals like uploading persons. He has in mind uploading our consciousness on brain-computer interfaces (BCI) that are in some way embodied— presumably cyborg or otherwise. He thinks that our future hope in the resurrection will include a radically transformed body anyway (Mercer 2015:29–30). Mercer (2015:30) argues that our Christian faith should not necessarily "insist on the continuation of homo sapiens." This brings him to ask whether "Christian theological anthropology is flexible enough to view posthuman persons or for that matter posthumans who do not meet the full criteria for personhood, as in the image of God?" (Mercer 2015:30). Cole-Turner believes that "Christians and Transhumanists are visionary partners" and that Christians should claim the Transhumanist project as their own. He argues that the foundation of Transhumanism is in line with the central teachings of Christian revelation; that is, "the hope of going beyond the human, beyond this present condition of our humanity and entering something indescribably rich and inexhaustibly glorious." Cole-Turner (2015:21) believes that this "is the central promise of the gospel. It is rooted in the incarnation itself, in God becoming human to raise humanity to a new and glorified state". One wonders whether Cole-Turner understands what it means to be truly human. He reckons that Transhumanism was birthed from Christianity and believes that God can work through our technology bringing about his ends (Cole-Turner 2015:21, 23).

One of the major obstacles to Transhumanism from a Christian perspective is the embodied resurrection. Related to the resurrection is Jesus's incarnation. He became human so that we may "participate in the divine reality and transcend at least some of the limits of ordinary human experience." (Curran

2017:23). In other words, Jesus becomes human—not cyborg—so that we may take part in his divine reality, not some kind of technological virtual reality. According to the Apostle Paul, this participation is by way of sharing in Jesus's life and suffering, his death and resurrection, and his mystical body (Rom 6:5; Gal 2:20; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24; cf. Curran 2017:22).

The Transhumanist looks for a way to overcome death, either by prolonging life using technology, uploading consciousness onto a brain–computer interface (BCI), or Cryonics. To be sure, Transhumanism offers a type of resurrection, but as Campbell (2006:69) explains, this resurrected transcendence is itself limited and beholden to physical technology.

The irony, of course, is that for the Christian believer, Jesus has already conquered death in his resurrection (Acts 2:24; 1 Cor 15:20; 2 Tim 1:10; Rev 1:18b). This means that we too will be recipients of eternal life, embodied resurrection (Luke 14:14; John 5:29; 1 Cor 15:50–55; 1 Thess 4:13–18; Rev 2:10–11; 20:6), and a redeemed creation (Is 11:1–9; 41:18–20; 66:22–23; Hos 2:18–19; Acts 3:20–21; Rom 8:18–23; 2 Cor 5:17; Rev 21:1–5; cf. Oesch 2020:220). Such a resurrection, which we assume would be the same as Jesus's resurrection (1 Cor 15:20; Phil 3:20-21), though probably of lesser glory but glorious nonetheless, will be transphysical as his (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–20; 1 Cor 15:51–53). In other words, there will be "continuity and discontinuity between our present and future bodies." (1 Cor 15:36–38; Phil 3:20–21; Rana 2019:256; Wright 2008:77). It is this resurrection that will finally restore our true humanity and free us from suffering and death (1 Cor 15:54; Is 65:17-19; Rev 21:4; Oesch 2020:222), making Transhumanist technology, as helpful as some of it might be, a poor and insipid substitute for the glorious resurrection we await. One wonders how for the Transhumanist Christian the resurrection might pan out for those individuals whose transition into Transhumanism has moved beyond being recognizably human (Dumsday 2017:618). Of course, this begs the question, at which point in the transhuman trajectory does being human begin to diminish? There is no clear threshold, but a teleological ethic may offer some guidance.

Furthermore, Waters (2011:172) reminds us that Christian theology upholds the sacredness of the body, and thus of embodiment. It is through our bodies that life is conceived, love is shared, and we fellowship with one another and

with God in worship. It is not that our soul—or the consciousness that makes up our personality—is rescued from our physical bodies. Our entire person is redeemed in resurrection life. Jesus's bodily resurrection shows this. The body ought not be despised; it is God's "gift endowed with sacredness", even though we long for its future resurrection (Campbell 2006:67). The resurrection, according to Scripture and Christian theology, is an embodied one, enjoying a transphysical and eternal existence—it is not a ghostly existence. Rana (2019:257) explains that our resurrected bodies will be: (1) imperishable, meaning that they will not succumb to disease, injuries, aging, or even death (1 John 3:2; 1 Cor 15:53–54); (2) powerful, that is, they will enjoy strength and power (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:43); (3) glorious, exhibiting "radiance, honor, and beauty." (2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:20); and (4) spiritual, meaning that they would be free from the corrupting power of sin and will be infused with the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:10; 1 Cor 2:14–15). Considering this, Christians are the true Transhumanists, quips Rana (2019:258). With a resurrected body like this in a renewed creation, who needs the Transhumanist (h+) project? The irony, as Rana (2019:253) points out, is that if enhancement technology is employed to re-create humanity, it will not be humans who are saved.

From a Christian worldview, the problem with Transhumanism is that it attempts to take charge of God's creative act and his creative process by disordering the created order into something that was never intended. Such Transhumanist creations are presumptuous at best. Even for a secular naturalist, do we have the right to redirect and manipulate our evolutionary process? Similarly, Parks (2019:213) says "our use of technology cannot decide what does and does not count as human—those beings who are so beloved of God that the Second Person became a man." He continues to argue that our use of technology ought not to be employed for violent ends that promote chaos and power (Parks 2019:213).

Transhumanism is a transgression of and violation against the sanctity and value of embodied human life as created by God (Hasselbrook 2022:27; Campbell 2006:67). This sacrilegious project is the result of hopelessness born out of dire despair and a rejection of natural embodiment and the limitations of human nature (Hasselbrook 2022:31). Hasselbrook (2022:31) argues that "Transhumanism is fundamentally a reaction against, not an answer to, the limitations and corruptibility of the human being. To confront this doubt,

Transhumanism seeks control over and correction to the imperfections of death, cognition, and morality." The more Transhumanists seek to overcome the effects of Adam's fall and humanity's sin, the more they put themselves in God's place as Creator and Designer (Gen 3; Hasselbrook 2022:31; cf. Oesch 2020:213).

The Oxford mathematician and philosopher of science John Lennox, himself a Christian, provides us with a helpful theological response to Transhumanism. While he believes that Christian theology and science are beautifully compatible (Lennox 2020:113–115), he looks at the creation account in the Garden of Eden where God provides a moral dimension for humanity. Lennox (2020:135-136) argues that, "Far from diminishing human status, by forbidding one thing, God conferred a unique dignity on humans." The moral boundary is constituted by the command not to eat a fruit from a certain tree. Transhumanism, however, by seeking to improve and even to "upgrade" human nature (Lennox 2020:146), may in time diminish freedom and free choice, and remove moral responsibility and human relationships (Cf. Oesch 2020:210). Furthermore, the creation of "a super-intelligent 'Homo Deus' will neither lead back to God nor lead to God, but rather to the greatest rejection of God." There is no way to bypass the consequences of humanity's sin, except in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the hope he brings to our world (Lennox 2020:227–228).

The concept championed by Transhumanism, to create godhood through super-longevity, super-intelligence, and super-well-being, is an ancient affair (Lennox 2020:157), reminiscent of the New Testament's warning of the "devil-inspired, anti-god, immensely powerful world leader who will in a future time claim divine honors and deceive the world by false wonders and who will be cataclysmically destroyed by the return of Christ in power and great glory" (Lennox 2020:206; cf. 2 Thess 2:1–12; Rev 13:1–18; 19:20; 20;10).

Naydler (2020:14) fears that the price of Transhumanism is the diminishing of spiritual life and our understanding of its meaning and purpose. Our understanding of the language used in our wisdom or religious traditions will also be lost, along with our humanity. It would not take long before we become inhuman. More frightening would be the inability to recognize that we have

lost our humanity or, at best, a feeling of indifference to that which we have lost.

According to Christianity, humanity is made in God's image (Gen 1:27). This forms the basis of a biblical ethical system (Rana 2019:183). While theologians might not always agree on what is meant by being made in the image of God, we can at least agree that we are in one way or another created in the likeness of God (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; Rana 2019:183).

Rana (2019:184) explains that being in the image of God may include the following: (1) having an innate understanding of right and wrong (morals and justice), (2) having an awareness of spirituality and a desire for the transcendent and to connect with it, (3) having a tendency to worship a deity, (4) having the cognitive capacity for reason and logic, (5) having an awareness of time - past, present and future, (6) and having an ability for creativity, whether it be in art, architecture, music, literature, science, and ironically, developing technology for Transhumanism. Rana (2019:178) proclaims that ethical considerations for Transhumanism need to take into account these human qualities which reflect the image of God. If not, transhuman ethics will be inadequate and will prove to be disastrous.

In his work, Hasselbrook (2022:32) picks up the issue of being created in God's image. Yet, after humanity's fall (Gen 3:6-7) they distorted this image in their sin. Now through Jesus 'sacrificial death, he redeems us and restores this image in us, by renewing and transforming us to be like himself (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; 2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 3:2). And so, as Rana (2019:144) says, the problem is not so much about Transhumanists playing God; it is that they use their "capacities as image bearers[7] to usurp God's authority." He suggests that this is analogous to the sin that the ancients committed when building the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–8. Building the tower to reach heaven was not the problem; the problem, Rana says, was their design to become like God and replace him (as if God could be replaced!). The Transhumanist project suffers from the same kind of attitude (Rana 2019:144).

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[7] I take it that those who have rejected God still bear God's image even if it's disfigured.

It is noticeable in this discussion that many of the distinctives of African holism are addressed in a biblical-theological response to Transhumanism. Theology does not merely serve its religious ends, at its very heart it also addresses very human concerns. It seeks to protect human progress and flourishing but not at the expense of diminishing human nature and the image of God *(imago Dei)*.

Transhumanism is here; it has been here since ancient times, but its technology is developing at a rapid rate, quicker than we might imagine, and there is little we can do to prevent it. Therefore, we need to develop appropriate ethical systems. The only way we can develop a suitable ethic for Transhumanism is if these systems protect the rights and dignity of humanity (Rana 2019:177).

A Teleological Ethic

As I showed earlier, Christians share common ground with some elements of the Transhumanist vision, despite nuanced differences which are quite significant. Rather than condemning all things Transhumanist, we ought to engage with it thoughtfully yet critically, because we have something important to offer the world. A biblical-theological critique is always best when it is served with a better alternative. And so, when we engage with the ethical concerns of Transhumanism and its technologies, our posture ought to be a positive and hopeful one, even though we might perceive it as a false gospel and a dangerous endeavor, keeping in mind that many of the human enhancement technologies might be of great service to many people (Oesch 2020:206; Rana 2019:246, 250–252).

Both Christianity and the Transhumanist project have a strong eschatological emphasis - except that Christian theology understands the end, the resurrection, and the coming of the new creation as a divine act, while Transhumanists see it as a series of human initiatives and technology bringing about a utopia (cf. Rana 2019:251; Tirosh-Samuelson 2012:721). With this kind of teleological focus, it seems suitable to select teleological ethics as an ethic for the concerns of Transhumanism.

Teleological ethics (sometimes called consequentialist ethics) is a moral theory that explores the morality of actions that would lead to the most desirable

outcome that could be achieved for everyone. In other words, the focus of teleological ethics is on the result or the consequence, not on the actions themselves that got us there. A frequent problem, however, is that the end does not necessarily justify the means. This is different from deontological ethics which places the emphasis on the ethics of the actions and how they adhere to common moral duties and standards, rather than their consequences which may be either good or evil (Baumane-Vitolina, Cals & Sumilo 2016:110; Britannica 2008). In my view, Transhumanism is more teleological than it is deontological, and while its end goal is desirable for a select few, it does not necessarily mean that the result will be best for the greater good of humanity. For this reason, I argue that we need to develop a teleological ethic for Transhumanism considering what African holism teaches us. As we learn from Lajul (2017:25), "Teleological and holistic natures of African metaphysics are not contradictory to each other." More importantly, we need to develop ethics that are informed by Scripture and Christian theology.

A primary goal of Transhumanism is not only to improve humanity using enhancement technologies, but also to change the nature of the human being. This has serious ethical and theological ramifications (Lennox 2020: 146). After all,

> Deification[8] does not transform us into independent deities but rather frees us from our pretensions to autonomy so that we may participate in the blessed, communal life of the triune God. We do not participate in that life merely by living longer, becoming smarter, looking sexier, acquiring more power, or improving our gene pool, but rather through the graced effort to live as holy people. We are upgraded from sinners to saints as we struggle to overcome our vices, to embody virtues like faith, hope, and love, and to practice the worship and contemplation of God. (Curram 2017:25)

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[8] We could take also use the more Protestant concept of "union with Christ."

According to Rana (2019:153), bioethicists are concerned about neuro-engineering technologies and gene editing that may "strip away personal and species-wide human identity." Many of the Transhumanist advances in science and technology will improve the lives of many who have suffered deformity, injury, or are handicapped in some way. However, the Transhumanist agenda is naïve because not only will it not solve all the problems of human pain and suffering in our world, but it will also ultimately create a new hybrid species. So, if we are going to make use of some human enhancement technology, we ought to develop a solid ethical framework that is both wise and appropriate for the preservation and flourishing of humankind (Rana 2019:73, 143).

If the ultimate goals of Transhumanism are realized, we will eventually reduce ourselves to sets of data, but as Shatzer (2021:138) explains, human beings are more than just chemical reactions in our material bodies. What Transhumanism would eventually save is anything but human (Rana 2019: 242). As Oesch (2020:224) correctly suggests, an authentic human being must be embodied in flesh and blood. Because of God's design this embodied arrangement of body and soul existing together affords human life and flourishing. It is not morally acceptable to diminish personhood by manipulating or swopping out embodiment (think cyborg), gender, or personality for enhancing one's physical and mental capacities (Campbell 2006:68–69). This would be a reordering of God's created order.

Oesch (2020:258) suggests that the following qualities are indicative of having a true sense of being human: (1) *Vocation.* Having a purpose in one's life, in the family, and in the community. For Christians, this includes a purpose to serve God in their community. (2) *Embodiment.* That is to have a real "sense of physical embodiment" which finds expression in sexuality, communication, compassion, and so on. Humans were not designed to be disembodied beings, but to be a psychosomatic whole. Our personhood is rich and complex, it is more than the mind, intellectual capability, spirituality, and bodily physicality. As we have seen, even Jesus 'resurrection and our coming resurrection is an embodied one. (3) *Community.* Every human being is meant to be connected to a community or communities. For Christians, this includes their church community. Communities offer networking, friendship, spiritual, moral, and often practical support, and accountability. In other words, communities offer relationships. Community and relationships provide great benefits for the

overall well-being of any individual connected to a community. As Oesch (2020:247) says, "To be human is to be in community with other people sharing the joys and pains of life together." Remember *Ubuntu?* There is a significant overlap between Oesch's list of human qualities and African holism.

However, drawing from theology and African Holism, I add two more qualities: (4) *Moral Freedom.* This is the God-given ability to exercise freedom of will by choosing between right and wrong, not to mention any number of other kinds of choices we might choose. Our moral freedom originates from being made in God's image *(imago Dei),* and God's "unconditional respect for the freedom of his creature" (Ratzinger 1988:216). This leads us to the fifth quality: (5) *Worship.* Humanity has the desire to worship a transcendent deity external to himself. In Christianity, especially, this pushes further in desiring to be in a relationship with the triune God in addition to worshiping him.

Despite the theological critique on the Transhumanism (h+) project, certain technologies would certainly help humanity, and so a teleological ethic for Transhumanism need not be a complicated one despite all the academic nuances. While many of us might not agree on what it means to be human, we all ought to agree on the five distinctions mentioned above, (1) vocation, (2) embodiment, (3) community (and relationship), (4) moral freedom, and (5) worship. The Transhumanist project may go on if we prioritize protecting these five distinctions at all costs. Secondly, we ought to treat human enhancement technologies as remedial only; that is, they should be employed only to fill the gaps due to impediments, handicaps, or injury.

One might imagine the Transhumanists rolling their eyes at such a teleological ethic, saying, "that makes the goal of Transhumanism redundant!" To which I reply, "If you have enough ingenuity, creativity, and determination to make Transhumanism a reality, then surely you can work within the parameters that protect the human identity and flourishing, all it takes is a little more imagination and humility.

Conclusion

Transhumanism is a broad philosophical, scientific, and technological movement that promotes the ideals of transforming human beings with

enhancement technology to transition into their next evolutionary step, becoming posthuman. This movement includes the noble desire to remove pain, and suffering, and prolonging human life, and more generally work towards a utopic future (Rana 2019:216). While researching I was astonished at how much common ground there is between Christian ideals and those of the Transhumanist (h+) project. This gives Transhumanism a quasi-religious sense (Tirosh-Samuelson 2012:719).

Regardless, Transhumanism is naïve because, as Waters (2011:173) says, "as one attempts to transform oneself into a superior being, the resulting posthuman becomes enslaved to itself as a self-constructed artifact, a semblance of a semblance." Not to mention that it diminishes and destroys the very thing (humanity) that it (supposedly) desires to save. It is not surprising that many of the concerns related to Transhumanism are the loss of human identity and dehumanization (Rana 2019:153).

Transhumanism is here to stay. There is no point in decrying the project. A more sustainable and helpful approach is to offer a framework for a teleological ethic that looks not only to protect humanity but to enable scientific advancement and human flourishing. A study of African holism and theological responses to Transhumanism offers us such an ethic, one that supplies parameters for safeguarding human identity. I argued that five distinctives make up a teleological ethic for Transhumanism: (1) *Vocation.* Protect and promote purpose in one's life, family, and community. This includes serving God in their communities for those who are Christian and are part of a church fellowship. (2) *Embodiment.* Although there should be provision for human enhancement technology for those in need, for example, prosthetic limbs, and implantable brain-computer interfaces for the paralyzed and handicapped, human beings ought to remain embodied in their biological body and this needs to be protected. Our sexuality, communication, and compassion must be authentic; enjoyed, and expressed in embodiment. This means that disembodiment is out of bounds. (3) *Community (and relationship).* Protect and promote personal relationships in communities like networking and friendships. Communities supply accountability, and spiritual, moral, and practical support. Community and relationships are significant contributions to human flourishing and development. (4) *Moral Freedom.* God has made us in his image, and thus has also given us the gift of free choice, and so our moral

freedom needs to be upheld and protected. (Ironically, this means that Transhumanists may either ignore or embrace this teleological ethic.) (5) *Worship.* Irrespective of one's faith tradition, humans were created to worship and look for the transcendent. Regardless of one's religious convictions, the innate desire for worship must be protected. For the Christian, the desire to worship and be in a relationship with God needs to be protected at all costs.

With ingenuity and humility, we may promote Transhumanist technology while also celebrating our human identity. Perhaps then it is no longer "Transhumanism" because there is no "trans." Instead it is "pro-humanism", and let's keep the (h+) for enhancement technology that might assist and promote human flourishing. Amen to Prohumanism (h+).

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