Be Very Afraid:  
Cyborg Athletes, Transhuman Ideals & Posthumanity

By Andy Miah  
Lecturer in Media, Bioethics, and Cyberculture  
University of Paisley at Ayr,  
Scotland, UK.

Please contact email@andymiah.net for correspondence.

Abstract

This paper argues that transhumanism lacks persuasiveness because its futurological underpinnings are met with skepticism, not due to a lack of applicability, but for the lack of clarity about how transhumanity can become manifest within a cautious technological society. It is considered that the integration of transhuman ideals within social praxis is problematic in a variety of social contexts, but that sport offers an example where transhumanism can be applied and where posthumanity is already realised. Sports perpetuate a sufficiently ambiguous concept of humanness so that value within sports is afforded by the transhuman qualities of athletes and their ability to transcend known boundaries of human capability. Sports tend towards, endorse and depend upon the physical transcendence of humanness. In this respect, sport offers a unique environment where transhumanism can gain social credibility and where its ideals become manifest and normalised.
“The transhuman condition is not about the transcendence of the human being, but concerns its non-teleological becoming in an immanent process of ‘anthropological deregulation’” (Annsell-Pearson, 1997, p.163).

Introduction

The motivation for the ensuing argument derives from an interest in defending transhumanism as a pertinent philosophical framework for understanding and preserving human value. This argument is provided as a substantive response to the claim that transhumanism is not a desirable philosophy for society to embrace. The intention is to demonstrate that transhumanism is far from being a marginal philosophy and that posthumanity is not a futuristic aspiration. Examples of present-day technology reveal the relevance of transhumanism now. This is articulated as being most profoundly evident within the realm of the elite sporting industry.

On this premise, it might seem contradictory that the title of this paper borrows from a prominent example of dystopian technological discourse about the metamorphosing human. Taken from David Cronenberg’s film re-make of The Fly (1986), the quote has gained cult status and is seen as a warning to aspiring Dr. Frankensteins. Indeed, the salience of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is crucial for understanding entrenched, dystopian visions about new technology, particularly technologies of the body.[1] Yet, the intention of this paper is to identify the inconsistency of this way of approaching technology, while also noting its inherent dangers – not for concerns about humanness (in the biological sense), but for concerns about personhood – or for the source of what gives value to being human.

Moral perspectives on contemporary and emerging technology are irrelevant in this discussion. It is taken for granted that new technologies, at best, give rise to a precautionary method of decision-making, most frequently based on fear of change. Additionally, it is assumed that such fear often subsides as either the technology becomes integrated with social habits, or as rational, objective facts become known which reveal the technology to be desirable. This does not imply the complete and indiscriminate acceptance of technology. Rather, it is to note that ‘fearing
the Other’, is more frequently a rational and justified fear of the unknown, than a genuine (and, again, rational) concern for understood and detrimental consequences that any technology might provoke. Perhaps a clear example of this is the hysteria concerning the use of human cloning, which has generated substantial worries about the prospect of de-valuing human life and ‘playing God’. Indeed, in most cases, fears are perpetuated by sensational stories about renegade scientists who ignore the dominant medical codes of conduct. Interestingly, this again is a consequence of the Frankenstein metaphor and so cannot be taken as serious moral condemnation for the technology.

This paper also challenges the medical distinction between human-alteration for health, and the use of medicine for enhancement, as a criterion of moral differentiation. It is suggested that medicine has already transgressed this boundary in its attempt to preserve human health (More, 1993b). In such cases, an interesting irony is that medicine is justified on the premise that it is life supporting rather than life enhancing. Yet, the distinctions are tenuous.

The Assault on Transhumanism

Being against transhumanism is not commensurate with technophobia. As Bostrom (1998) outlines, transhumanism is a philosophy that is directed towards specific kinds of technology, frequently upon technologies that are currently emerging from theoretical possibilities such as cryonics, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence. For this reason, being unconvinced by transhuman aspirations entails the rejection of fantastical technologies as being unrealisable or undesirable for the interests of humans, rather than the complete rejection of technology. On this basis, it can be understood why transhumanism remains marginal as a philosophical discipline though, ironically, this is for all the wrong reasons. On the basis of the technologies of concern to transhumanists, it is not clear how posthumanity can become realiseable. The possibilities of time-travel or teleportation remain the business of science fiction.[2] Moreover, if the basis of the transhumanist philosophy has something to do with critiquing the fixedness of the human condition, then it might still be argued that these transhuman technologies do not, in fact, go beyond humanity; they might simply alter it.

It is for this reason that arguments concerning transhumanism must articulate how “our posthuman future” (Fukuyama, 2002) can become recognised as our posthuman present (perhaps to the disappointment of Fukuyama).
Importantly, it is not necessary to look at the future or even at the more fantastical technologies with which transhumanists are often more concerned, even if they are an important and defining characteristic of transhumanism. In addition, technologies that might facilitate posthumanity must first become enculturated within significant human practises before any change in beliefs about human-altering technologies can take place. Although societies might make use of various technologies, and use them to their advantage, such activities do not necessarily entail a shift in beliefs about the sanctity of the human body. Before it is possible for transhumanism to become a persuasive narrative of human ontology, it is necessary for the transhumanist technologies and ideals to be applied at the quotidian level of social experiences.

**Medical Transhumanists**

Perhaps one of the most pervasive examples of transhuman technology is found in medical science. Ever since the mass production of pharmaceutical products, conventional medicine has encouraged a symbiotic relationship between humans and technology – a relationship that is already one where the human subject is submissive to the technology. Recent times have demonstrated the transplantation of human limbs (Hawkes & Maynard, 1998), the growth of organs (Murray, 1997), the manipulation of genes (Harris, 1998), the emergence of advanced prosthetics (Mayes, 1995), and the development of countless medicines that can prolong existence, make it more bearable, or, perhaps, eventually make it immortal (Ettinger, 1964). Such technologies have the benefit of a long history of human-technology synergism, where the technologies have been legitimised because it has been concluded that they are beneficial for humans by correcting dysfunction (as opposed to adding enhancement). On this premise of ‘repair’, one might conclude that human-altering technologies are constitutive of human existence, since even the very elementary methods of illness remedy might be seen as human-altering technologies (Ettinger, 1972). Consequently, such domains where the technologies are already being used, and where any alteration to the human subject by way of these technologies must necessarily take place, are the most likely sites for reinforcing the persuasiveness of transhuman ideals.

Medicine has limitations, however, which make it a problematic example upon which to base the pervasiveness of transhumanness. Medical technologies perpetuate transhumanist ideals only insofar as they utilise new technology with the aim of repairing humans, rather than enhancing them. Medicine has been premised upon restoration, rather than the creation of
new levels of human capability through such repair. Thus, the main part of medical history has been only partially transhuman, since it has been limited by the narrow reasons for which it makes use of technology. Indeed, one might even question the degree to which medical technologies are at all transhuman, since the concept of making well does not seem, necessarily, to encompass making a person more than well (as would be the ambition of transhumanist technologies). Nevertheless, an emerging discourse about the merits of enhancement technology, particularly deriving from genetic research, would suggest that this perspective might be insufficient to guard against transhuman applications of medicine. Indeed, it seems most likely that the boundaries between repair and enhancement will become sufficiently blurred so as to allow for enhancement.

Discussions about enhancement and repair beg the question about how one can clearly define when a technology is repairing a person or when it is enhancing them, since each term depends upon an ambiguous normative prescription. If repair involves restoration to some former level of functioning, then, perhaps, enhancement involves the creation of something that exceeds the former character in some quantitative degree. However, it is unclear whether a human being has been enhanced, if that person has not been enhanced beyond a prescribed norm or, indeed, the maximum capability of its species. The issue becomes further confused when one considers that making people well from illness might also be conceived as enhancing them. After all, they will have been enhanced from their former (ill) state. However, this does not seem to be what is understood as enhancement when discussed in the context of super-humans (accepting Ettinger’s [1972] portrayal of the human as bound to illness and in terminal disrepair). This example illustrates the ambiguity of how the term ‘enhancement’ is used and the subsequent difficulty that would arise if one were to conclude that ‘humans should be repaired but not enhanced.’

It seems logical to speak of repair when a person has been made healthier from a state of illness. Yet, it is problematic to place a standard upon what is to be considered as healthy. If a fairly sedentary adult human were diagnosed as being healthy, then how would this person compare to a healthier person? Using the terms above, it might be appropriate to diagnose the sedentary adult as unhealthy and so to conclude that the person is in need of medical attention, though their lifestyle might be entirely consistent with such a level of health.

For present purposes, it will be considered that repair refers either to the effect of normalising a subject’s health (raising the health of a person to a level of their normal lifestyle functioning), or perhaps, to their health level.
prior to the need for repair. Conversely, enhancement will refer to repair that makes the individual more capable than they were prior to the need for repair, and more significantly, to a level that exceeds the capabilities of all human beings.

It is this distinction that forces acknowledgment of the inadequacy of medicine to strengthen transhumanism. The technology can obviously bring about the necessary physical changes in people that would warrant the label of posthumanity, but it is less clear that it can change what a person believes about what is ‘natural’ about their body. Indeed, it is more likely that the integration of new technologies will operate within a shifting framework of what is normal. Thus, as the prospect of using in-vitro fertilisation would have seemed unnatural in the 1960s, it is now (for some) a supportive technology that does not challenge humanness in any way. Medical technology is not able to support transhumanist ideals precisely because it normalises technology, bringing it under the humanist guise of therapy. In contrast, the requirement of the transhumanist is to make sense of these technologies as transcending humanism, as becoming something beyond humanness (not nonhuman, but posthuman).

Nevertheless, recently medical science has discovered technologies that challenge this distinction. Consequently, it might seem premature to discard medicine as a significant context within which sympathy for transhumanism can emerge. Indeed, it would be facile to deny the importance of medicine as a major incentive towards the developments of technologies. Although these technologies would begin for the purposes of repair, they might eventually become enhancing – as can be argued with cosmetic surgery (Haiken, 1997).

Frequently, cosmetic surgery is undertaken for health reasons and medicine can sometimes be used for cosmetic purposes. Yet, acknowledging this distinction (that repair involves restoration and enhancement involves exceeding some level of normal functioning), it is possible to legitimise (or normalise) the use of health-based cosmetic surgery and to conclude that non-health-related cosmetics is not really about medicine at all. Rather, such procedures make manifest the influence of other cultural edifices that are emerging and which require persons to embrace these technologies. Such procedures as cosmetic surgery are more likely to facilitate transhuman ideals and make possible posthumaness, than would medical reasons. When it becomes expected that humans will use some form of enhancement to compete in the technological society, the transhuman identity will perpetuate the lives of every person and become an unquestionable narrative and metaphysical evolution in the human species.
However, the medical industry is unique in its encapsulation of a dysfunctional technological environment. Within medicine, technology has a clearly defined role in relation to the human being, though it also has a very limited context within which its appropriateness is evaluated. Furthermore, it may be argued that, despite their virtuous ambitions, medical technologies continue to reflect a depressive, rather than impressive, appreciation of technology. Among doctors, hospitals, and health care practices, one cannot but experience dislike about the increasing dependence of human lives upon technologies (Waldby, 1997). Medicine does not provide an environment that is conducive to the acceptance of high technology within all forms of cultural endeavour. Rather, medicine describes a fairly narrow, quite non-transhuman-like appreciation for how technology ought to be used.

Medicine has always been about repair rather than enhancement and, while the repair/enhancement distinction remains tacitly made, it seems fairly clear that, when medical procedures are undertaken for reasons other than health (e.g. repair), it is not medicine that is bringing about the change. In the case of cosmetic surgery, it seems reasonable to attribute such a shift in how people view their bodies to media images, fashion, and other mediators of socially desirable body images. A more interesting situation would arise if cosmetic surgery were to be used to ‘add’ features to the ‘normal’ human being. For example, surgery might be used to enhance our functionality by creating additional limbs or enhanced sensory capabilities. Already, this is being done partially, where eye surgery is being used to enhance human sight beyond what is medically recognised as perfect human vision. This use of cosmetic surgery is more aligned with transhuman ideals, though it is not yet clear that many people are actively pursuing such changes.

Perhaps one of the only ‘strong poets’ in this respect is body-artist Stelarc, who continues to have the ambition of appending an additional ear to the side of his face using cartilage. Stelarc’s strong transhumanist, artistic statements do seem to challenge our accepted view of being human, though it might be worth questioning whether transhuman ideals are reflected solely by bodily transformations.

From these ideas about cosmetic surgery, it seems reasonable that there will come a time when people will seek to enhance their bodies inwardly. It seems self-evident that cultures so concerned with altering outward appearance to attain more comfortable lifestyles would eventually realise the lucrative benefits of changing the internal constitution of the body as well (Blake, 1996). Such technologies are available within medicine for the
purposes of repair, and as with cosmetic surgery, it might be argued that such technologies will become available for persons seeking to enhance their physical and mental capabilities, as well as their appearance. After all, one would think that super-human powers would offer many more lucrative opportunities than super-beautiful looks.

Such forms of enhancement constitute the major frontier beyond which humans must venture if they are to become posthuman. For transhumanism to become the present and dominant ontology of humanness requires a facilitating forum comparable to that which mediated the emergence of cosmetic surgery as an enculturated form of human existence. Within such an environment, it would then be possible for the human and posthuman conditions to blur and shift human self-perceptions towards the latter. Yet, cosmetic medicine is an exceptional example, the use of which concerns only a minority of people.

One further complication to this debate involves the concepts of ‘personhood’ and ‘becoming human’ as a basis for believing that current premises are entirely irrelevant. Thus, the acceptability of new technologies has nothing to do with a distinction between repair and enhancement. Rather it has to do with a non-biological concept of personhood or an understanding of what is meant by becoming human in a moral sense. In recent bioethical discussions, these concepts have been suggested as superseding the biological definition of being human as a basis for evaluating technology.[3] Thus, in the present discussion, it is somewhat of a misnomer to discuss concerns for both transhumanism and posthumanism, since neither reflects the morally alarming feature of humanness.[4]

**Sports Medicine: Logically Incompatible?**

In response to the inadequacy of medical science to provoke the quotidian sense of being posthuman, a more persuasive context can be found in elite sports competition. On first impressions, it might seem an unusual human practise to cite as the most significant transhuman-promoting institution, particularly since there are countless other human practises where the use of technology seems significantly more radical and even boundless. It might be argued, for example, that space travel, or computer technologies are more likely to enable a shift in human perspectives about human identity. Indeed, it would seem fair to argue that such technologies have already forced humans to become posthuman (Hayles, 1999). However, sports are a particularly interesting case because of their greater subtlety as being posthuman practices. Sport, it would seem, is premised upon idealistic notions of humanness, such as being natural, and even being healthy. As
well, the guardians of sport – national and international federations –
endeavour to uphold some moral code in the aspiration of fair play, that
uphold a sporting moral norm (Loland, 2001).

Yet, sport is already posthuman. Athletes have already metamorphosed into
super-humans, blurred suitably by the softening presentation of modern
television. Athletes are ambassadors of transhumanism, placed at the
cutting edge of human boundaries of capability. The athlete’s body is in a
state of flux, continually transcending itself, and thus, perpetuating
transhuman ideas about the biophysics of humanity. For this reason, elite
sport is a useful case from which one can justify the acceptance of
transhumanism. Alternative technologies, such as those described above,
are unable to remove such boundaries despite their effecting a distinct
blurring of humans and technology (Lupton and Noble, 1997).

In the pursuit of performance, elite sports tend towards, endorse, and
depend upon athletes transcending themselves (via their performances).
With fair means or without, athletes seek enhancement technologies, even if
it is simply a lighter tennis racquet (Miah, 2000) or a neoprene swimming suit
(Magdalinski, 2000). Most recently, the cyborg-athlete has entered into
simulation-booths (also known as altitude chambers or tents), so they can
acclimatising their bodies to varying heights above sea level.[5] Athletes
moving from a low country to a high one in which to compete are
substantially disadvantaged, so this is a way in which an athlete can,
perhaps, level the playing field.[6] On the basis of these kinds of examples,
the pursuits of elite athletes would seem commensurate with transhuman
ideals, regardless of whether an athlete would admit this.

It is because of these technologies that elite athletes are so persuasively
transhuman. Athletes continually aspire to transcend known human limits. In
short, it is their ambition to break the boundaries of human capability. In this
respect, the kind of transcendence that is being described is a physical
transcendence of a very specific kind. It is a transcendence of the human
body, where such transcendence will move us “from the transhuman stage
into posthumanity, where our physical and intellectual capacities will
exceed a human’s as a human’s capacities exceed an ape’s” (More,
1993a).

This posthumanness in sports can be understood as having been brought
about by the importance of ‘performance enhancement.’ Performance
enhancement has been a central issue in sports related literature and sports
science for many years. Sport philosophy has concerned itself particularly
with the problematic matter of drug taking and doping as examples of
unacceptable performance enhancement, recognising the ethical issues that their use evokes. From such ideas have emerged arguments about the appropriateness of these methods in the contexts of fair play (Gardner, 1989), paternalism (Brown, 1984), dehumanisation (Hoberman, 1988; Simon, 1984), and social contracts (Fraleigh, 1984), whilst others have written about the intractable situation that describes performance enhancement (Eassom, 1995). The concept of ‘performance enhancement’ has strong associations with elite competition, where the importance of winning is paramount for many reasons. Whether it is characterised as the ‘performance principle’ (Hoberman, 1992) or ‘achievement-oriented sport’ (Elias and Dunning, 1986), the cultural, indeed, global edifice that is elite sport undoubtedly places great emphasis upon the ability to excel. As such, opportunities to enhance performance do not fail to be central to the praxis of elite competitions. For this reason, aspiring to performance enhancement has gained some kind of legitimacy – except of course when the means through which enhancement is gained are identified as unethical or unfair, as has been the case with drug taking and doping. Indeed, this particular point is perhaps the most salient to address in order to convey sport’s posthumanness.

Arguably, the example of sport as being transhuman could be refuted for it is pervasive in governmental and sport policy that the use of drugs or other such methods of doping are unacceptable. Consequently, it might seem that this supposedly transhuman environment is merely a charade. On this basis, it might be concluded that transhuman technologies are not welcome in sport. However, the arguments underpinning such condemnation of these kinds of enhancement are not persuasive, though this paper does not intend to deconstruct argument about drug use. Indeed, the main premise of this paper has rejected the importance of ethical deliberations as a basis for evaluating technology in terms of it being transhuman or not. Rather, the salient characteristic of this condemnation is whether it embodies anti-transhuman ideals. I wish to suggest that it does not. Indeed, drug issue in sport is no example whatsoever to be used as a basis for concluding that sports are not yet posthuman. At most, it reflects societal ambivalence towards drugs, which tends more to err on the side of caution when it involves legitimising drug use. Indeed, the legalisation of drugs is no barrier whatsoever to the realisation of posthumanliness. This is why it is argued that sports are already transhuman in their ideology.

However, if this position is not accepted, then there are reasons to suppose that the claims against drug use and other methods of doping will become less persuasive. Despite the emotive rhetoric about removing drugs and other such things from sport in order to preserve its alleged integrity, the fight
against drugs does not seem a good fight at all. Indeed, it reflects more a rather biased notion of what constitutes fair play, prioritising one version of fairness over another. We begin by recognising that the amount of money invested into anti-drug use programs is minimal in relation to world sporting finance. Furthermore, if we then consider the investment of the sport budget into devising coherent ethical perspectives, then drug use in sport does not seem much of a priority for sporting authorities. As well, if we recognise that athletes are often ahead of testing measures, which leaves sports authorities only catching the athletes who have made mistakes or use primitive techniques of doping, then the future looks bleak for anti-doping programmes. Add to this the possibility of genetic doping, and then even if there were a case for rejecting doping, it would be difficult to implement.

However, the salient point is that there is no good case against many methods of doping. At the very least, there is no coherent ethical policy distinguishing between the many kinds of performance enhancements in sport (to include altitude tents, drug use, and genetic doping). It is the lack of this ethical rigour in sporting policy that makes unlikely the persuasiveness of anti-technological values.

Finally, departing from a system of values in sports that seems to prioritise performance over, for example, fair play, it could be argued that performance modification is critical to sustain value in sports. If the ‘fair play’ advocates wish to conclude that an ‘anything goes’ perspective on performance modification in sport is unacceptable, as it defeats the very purpose of sport, then it might simply be concluded that sports authorities must legitimise a greater number of performance modifiers, thus making them legal and silencing those who cry ‘cheat’ on learning of a poor athlete who mistakenly used a Vicks Inhaler because they felt a little rundown before a competition.[7]

Thus, athletes engage in highly sophisticated forms of training and use ‘altitude chambers’ to adapt to different altitudes without travelling to a different climate. As well, athletes utilise technology to make their actions more efficient through such innovations as tennis racquets, golf clubs, and training shoes, and they consume a diet that is far from being ‘normal’, if the term is to be of any use. [8] What is most pertinent about this argument is that the concepts of normality or artificiality are unhelpful for concluding that doping is unacceptable within sports, since it could equally be argued that the examples of legitimate methods of enhancement as described above, also constitute artificial aids to performance. As such, it is considered here that such questionable bases of argument cannot be sustained, particularly in a sporting environment that is increasingly immersed in a drug
culture (as might be argued from the 1998 Tour de France).[9]

While it might not be wise to found any argument about the transhuman status of the Olympic Games upon its slogan, the Olympic motto – Citius, Altius, Fortius – can be seen as perpetuating transhumanist ideas about the dynamic of the human condition. Undoubtedly, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, did not suppose that humans would, some day, make people ‘swifter, higher and stronger’ at any cost. However, it is becoming more apparent that the motto, perhaps, ought to include a more broad acceptance of forms of enhancement, since athletes are increasingly becoming less able to achieve ‘swifter, higher, stronger’ (Blake, 1996; Tenner, 1996). On the basis of performance modification needs, sports will be forced to endorse these, previously, questionable and unethical means if they are to maintain the values upon which elite sport is founded.

Indeed, former IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch made what is probably a misinterpreted suggestion that sports perhaps should relax their banning of all illegal substances in competition, perhaps thereby signifying a realisation of the need for artificial enhancement. Regardless of Samaranch’s intent, there is an underlying reason to presume that such embrace will occur: athletes are reaching the limits of their unenhanced physicality (Kearney, 1996). Consequently, given the already recognised necessity for athletes to continue to surpass their predecessors, it is inevitable that athletes must seek other means to enhance their performance - which will necessarily require the acceptance of drugs and much more. Though this ought not be too surprising, since the popular conception of what are acceptable methods of performance modification is limited to that which is within the rules of competition. This conception is not some theorised perspective on what is morally acceptable from a perspective of wishing to preserve some privileged notion of humanness (though this might be a more credible position).

Nevertheless, even if it cannot be envisioned that such enhancements as drugs will become allowed in competitive sports - the endorsement of transhumanist ideals can be argued from the ways in which other forms of technology are paramount to sports activities. The technological status of many sports is extremely distinct, with many kinds of sports equipment accepted, based upon a questionable condition of whether or not they detract from the integrity of the sport (Verbruggen, cited in Fotheringham, 1996). Furthermore, the degree of sophistication that sports equipment describes, alludes to technology that will become indistinguishable from the athlete’s body. Comparable to the way in which prosthetic devices supplant biological limbs, it can be noticed how sports equipment is
becoming increasingly a part of athletes, rather than an extension of them. For example, the British Olympic Athlete Colin Jackson was recently fitted with running shoes that were biomechanically modeled to fit the shape of only his feet. The innovation was developed in order to provide a shoe that was most perfect for the athlete and which were an extension of the unprotected foot offering maximum comfort and ease of performance (Hargrave, 1998).

Conclusion

Within the transhumanist literature, argumentation is seldom concerning how transhumanism will become manifest within human practises. It is often assumed that such practicalities will be dealt with by virtue of having the technology. The perspective of technological determinism that pervades scientific research and technological application seems to lead to the presumption that human barriers will be broken and skepticism will subside. Such determinism is the chosen argument for some theorists (Smith and Marx, 1994), who conclude that its application is beyond deliberation, since its possibility will ensure its implementation. However, it seems clear that a reluctance to look upon technologies favourably, with the eyes of the state and of its populace, has significant influence upon the limits of its application and regulation as seems evident from the recent moratorium placed upon the cloning of human beings by a wide variety of governments.

The transhuman status of present-day technologies dealt with in this paper, has been used to argue strongly that posthumanity is already present in elite sporting practices. In this context, where sport is largely recognised as a moral pursuit, championing human values, athletes are identifiable as already posthuman in their biological constitution and in the manner of approaching technology as an enhancing resource. Nevertheless, the pervading humanism that is also evident in sport and which is reflected by concerns for doping, demands the conclusion that sports also reflect a context where the human and posthuman is blurring. Conceivably, this might translate into a normalising of supposedly transhuman technologies, such as is evident by the acceptance of some kinds of technologies, including altitude chambers. In these circumstances, it is possible for humans to become posthuman, while believing that such qualities remain fundamentally human.

REFERENCES


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Notes

[1] Arguably, Frankenstein’s monstrous creation was more a victim than it was a terror. If the monster had been shown love and kindness—indeed, if it had been accepted as human, then it might not have been driven to the dastardly acts for which it became infamous.

[2] See Varzi and Coen (2001) for a cleverly constructed and witty example of the seriousness that such research might receive.

[3] The condition of personhood as a defining limit for acceptable technologies is dealt with most recently by Glannon (2001). However, it is important not to
overlook the Kantian roots of the concept as ‘respect for persons’ or John Locke’s requirement of self-consciousness, nor to forget the work of Tooley (1986) and Glover (1984), which have made substantial contributions to this issue.

[4] A useful example to illustrate these claims could be found in the context of sex definition and sex-altering surgery. In this case, medical surgery is performed, not with a view to enhance or repair, but to allow a person to feel more complete, perhaps even, more human. This might also tie in with ideas found in Kramer (1994) and Slater (1995) and the discussion of SSRIs in general, which, arguably, allow some people to realise the person they believe that they should be.

[5] Currently, these technologies are legal, though International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge is beginning to express concern, considering them to be unacceptable because they are, supposedly, artificial (Magnay, 2002). I fail to understand how the ‘laboratory’ gymnasiums that are perfectly acceptable and technologically sophisticated are so very different from an altitude chamber.

[6] It would be interesting to dig further into the inconsistencies within sport for how varying kinds of technology are deemed legitimate or not. For example, the use of altitude tents is considered acceptable by governing bodies of sport, though blood doping is not. This latter technique involves removing blood from an athlete and re-introducing the same blood back into the athlete’s body at such a time when the athlete will have regained their original blood constitution. By reintroducing the extracted blood, the athlete would thus have a boosted red blood-cell count, which can increase the capability for endurance. These two examples – one illegal, the other legal – have precisely the same kind of consequence. However, the reason for why they are considered morally different lacks persuasiveness.

[7] This comment refers to the case of Alain Baxter, Gold medal winner at the Salt Lake City Olympic Winter Games 2002, who subsequently has been charged with a positive doping test. He claims that he simply bought a Vicks inhaler while in the States to clear his nose, the same one he uses in the United Kingdom. Unknown to him, the very same product in the US contains a miniscule amount of a banned substance and he now faces penalties from various sporting authorities for having used this product. In excess of the ridiculousness of the case, it is more alarming that athletes are demonised by the media for such mistakes, than is the possibility that this substance might have affected performance. (A further weakness in the opinion against drug use is that there is very little evidence to conclude that many of the substances that are illegal actually enhance performance.) Indeed, the notion that athletes must monitor every single substance that comes into contact with their body lends strength to their cyborg status.

[8] The author wishes to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing to his attention the need to make more explicit this recognition of the athlete’s already transhuman status. Thus, it is considered that the psychological and emotional support provided for the elite athlete, insomuch as it translates into an
enhancement in performance, is also implicated by these concerns. Indeed, it is interesting to note that it would not be illegal for an athlete to be hypnotised before competition into believing that he/she does not feel pain. Whilst the effects of such methods are questionable, the example serves to illustrate the inconsistency of arguments about what constitutes appropriate forms of enhancement in competitive sport.

[9] Whilst limited as a comparison between different sports, it is interesting to recognise that body building now has separate competitions for enhanced and non-enhanced athletes, for ‘clean’ and ‘drug enhanced’ athletes. Whilst not strictly the intention of this paper, it might be argued that such a future describes other sports as well.