Chapter 42
The Technoethical Ethos of Technic Self-Determination

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses concerns that the development and proliferation of Human Enhancement Technologies (HET) will be (a) dehumanizing and (b) a threat to our autonomy and sovereignty as individuals. The paper argues contrarily that HET constitutes nothing less than one of the most effective foreseeable means of increasing the autonomy and sovereignty of individual members of society. Furthermore, it elaborates the position that the use of HET exemplifies – and indeed even intensifies – our most human capacity and faculty: namely the desire for increased self-determination, which is referred to as the will toward self-determination. Based upon this position, the paper argues that the use of HET bears fundamental ontological continuity with the human condition in general and with the historically-ubiquitous will toward self-determination in particular. HET will not be a dehumanizing force, but will rather serve to increase the very capacity that characterizes us as human more accurately than anything else.

INTRODUCTION

The present article first articulates an ontology of self-determination based upon self-modification and self-modulation (i.e. deliberate modification or modulation of the material processes and systems constituting our bodies and brains), characterizing self-determination as a modality (i.e. that there can be degrees of self-determination, or that it isn't an absolute, all-or-none category) that encompasses any act of manipulating the material systems and processes underlying the body and mind so as to effect certain changes to the emergent operation, function or capacities of the body or to the modes of experience, thought and perception available to the mind.

Secondly, it illustrates (1) how HET constitutes a distinct modality of self-determination, which we refer to as technic[1] self-determination, that is encompassed by the broader ontology of self-determination previously articulated, (2) how technic self-determination nevertheless bears ontological continuity with existing and historical (predominantly non-technological) means and modalities of self-determination

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as practiced by contemporary and historical humans, as well as (3) why technic self-determination (and the use of HET in general and neurotechnology in particular that underlie it) constitute humanity's most effective and most extensive means of self-determination, and thus of *increasing* their available capacity for self-determination.

Thirdly, the article turns to the topic of human nature and human dignity, arguing that it is humanity's will toward self-determination that best distinguishes humans as such, and accordingly that the will toward self-determination constitutes the best available candidate for a universal human condition.

Fourthly, the article analyzes the extent with which limited availability of HET across different geographic, sociopolitical and economic classes could cause a net decrease in society's capacity for self-determination by giving those who can afford HET an increased capacity for technological self-determination at the expense of those who cannot.

The article concludes by arguing (1) that technic self-determination (and the use of HET that underlies it) will not be dehumanizing because HET will simply serve to increase our *existing* degree of and capacity for self-determination and (2) that HET bears ontological continuity with the existing tools and techniques for affecting the substratum of self, and as such with human nature itself. Quite to the contrary of critics concerned with the potential for dehumanization and a violation of human dignity, technic self-determination and HET will maintain, continue and extend rather than rend asunder that which makes us most human.

Technoethics is an interdisciplinary field focusing on the moral and ethical aspects and repercussions of technology upon society (Luppicini and Adell, 2008; Luppicini, 2010). While the field encompasses all technology and is in no way limited to emerging technologies in general and HET in particular, such technologies are of particular importance to the field due to their heightened capacity to increase the physical and mental capacities of individuals, and due to the stark and intense ethical issues that HET are enshrouded by. The field has never been so poignant and prescient, and the need for its continued development so pressing, when one considers the ever-increasing rapidity with which advances in science, technology and medicine are occurring, and due to the increasing ever-increasing gravity of the ethical issues surrounding such advances. Today more than ever before technology serves as a prosthetic Prometheus, holding the potential to turn man into titan, and the ethicacy of this potential begs our attention. This paper presents an ontology of self-determination that connects the timeless human drive toward self-determination to technology in general and emerging technologies in particular, arguing that particular sets of emerging technologies (with particular emphasis on HET) will increase humanity's capacity for self-determination to as-yet unseen heights, and subsequently connects this thesis with the modalities of self-determination in general and technological (or more specifically technic) modalities of self-determination in particular that humanity has used to effect self-determination throughout its history. The present article's relevance to technoethics lies in the extent with which a technologically-mediated increase in humanity's capacity for self-determination, both as individuals and as a society, is ethical and desirable. Summarily, the article argues in favor of the ethicacy of an increased capacity for self-determination via the use and proliferation of HET in general and neurotechnology in particular, positing that rather than constituting a disruption of the human condition this new form of technic self-determination constitutes an ontological continuation of the human condition. The article's fourth topic – namely, the extent with which the availability of such HET in general and neurotechnology in particular might be limited to certain geographic, sociopolitical and/or economic classes, and what this might mean for the ultimate ethicacy and desirability of its development – is of particular relevance to the field of technoethics because one of its central issues as it pertains to HET in particular is the pos-

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