**DT – Reading Section**

*You are going to read about the basics of transhumanist thought by the British Institute of PostHuman Studies.*

**PostHuman: An Introduction to Transhumanism**

Every aspect of our lives has been reshaped by technology from the way we get around, the way we seek information, and the way we communicate. It's easy to think that if only our technology advances enough, we'll finally be satisfied. The fact is we remain restrained by our primitive Darwinian brains. Humanity, for whatever progress we have made, is the result of an unguided, natural, 3.8 billion-year-long experiment of chemistry. Evolution is the process that has made you what you are but it does not and cannot consider the future, make decisions about where we ought to go, how we ought to be. Passing on genes is the only objective but as thinking human beings we care about far more than that. Consciousness means that we have the capacity to experience the world, to reflect upon and most importantly to shape it.

And so what begins as humanism, our most sympathetic understanding and treatment of human nature, becomes transhumanism which means the drive to fundamentally revolutionize what it means to be human through technological advancements. Changing human nature might be the most dangerous idea in all of human history or perhaps the most liberating. In general terms, transhumanist thought is based on two pillars. First, it considers current trends to see how future technologies will develop and how they might affect us. Second, it calls for the use of current and upcoming technology to bring about beneficial societal change. Three central areas of transhumanist thought standout: super longevity, super intelligence and super well-being. They are called the three supers because of their extraordinary transformative potential.

A thought experiment may be useful to get your intuitions flowing. Consider that an evil organization creates an airborne virus. It infects you and the entire human race. As a result, 100,000 people are dying every day. Within thirty years, a billion people (one in seven) will have died because of the virus. Now how much money should world leaders put into research to develop an antidote? How high on our list of global priorities would you rate this? There is no denying the situation would be dying**.** Most people would demand immediate action but this is just a thought experiment. However, in reality this is quite not the case. 100,000 people really do die every day from diseases caused by aging. However, no one treats aging as a global priority; this is clearly a double standard. Are we simply resigned to death by aging?

Aubrey de Grey, an expert and researcher on aging, argues that our priorities are fundamentally skewed and that we must start thinking seriously about preventing the huge number of deaths due to aging which is the greatest cause of fatal diseases in the western world. The goal of this strand of transhumanism is super longevity. Today, we have the minds and the equipment to begin developing technologies to combat aging. Unfortunately, we lack the will and the financial support to do **so**. Most of us are so accustomed to the idea of growing old that aging seems like just a fact of life. If modern medicine is supposed to keep us alive and healthy for as long as possible, then the anti-aging movement takes medicine to its logical conclusion. It's what happens when as long as possible which means as long as we want. But what would a world without aging look like? How would we manage the huge population growth? And who would own the technology that makes it possible?

Every year, computers are getting more powerful. What used to fill up a room now fits in our pockets. More crucially, the time it takes for computer power to double is also getting shorter. To exemplify, recently, computer memory capacity doubled from 256 GB to 512 GB and computer speed doubled from 1GHz to 2 GHz too quickly. At the outset of computing, the doubling process took 18 months. And this interval appears to be getting smaller. Plot this on a graph, and it is not a straight line but an exponential upward curve. We need only project into the future to see that there is a point at which this line is practically vertical- a moment in human history referred to as the technological singularity. The futurist thinker Ray Kurzweil postulates that as these technologies develop, we will likely edit our bodies in order to integrate with computers more and more. This concept should be familiar. We are already in a symbiotic relationship with technology. You can send your thoughts at incredible speeds to recipients on the other side of the planet, find your precise location using satellites and access the world's repository of recorded human knowledge with the device you carry with you at all times. And all of this was unthinkable 20 years ago.

Out of this predicted computer capability explosion may eventually come artificial intelligence (AI) - a simulated consciousness in silicon. Given the rate at which an AI will be able to improve itself, it will quickly become capable of thought for precision, speed and intelligence presently inconceivable to the human mind. If Kurzweil is right and we end up integrating ourselves with technology, we could be in private contact with this AI whenever we choose. The result of this is that we effectively merge with this AI and its abilities become our own. This would propel the human race into a period of super intelligence. But perhaps as some argue no non-biological computer could ever become conscious because AI goals differ from our own. And what does our increasing reliance on computers mean for our future? Super longevity and super intelligence are all well and good but only as long as they make us feel happier, more fulfilled and more content.

The last section of transhumanism deals with the issue of well-being. Imagine you are a soon-to-be parent. Your doctor informs you that, if you wanted, you could choose certain features of your child’s biology: you could choose how genetically prone to depression they would be, their levels of anxiety, jealousy, anger and even their pain threshold... Would you choose a high likelihood of chronic depression, an intolerably low pain threshold? How about panic attacks and anxiety? Probably not. The last major branch of transhumanism, spearheaded by philosopher David Pearce, aims to investigate and phase-out suffering. He argues that ultimately all our conscious states, our feelings, moods and emotions are all an expression of our brain chemistry. For Pears, it is just clear that natural selection hasn't designed us to be happy; it has designed us to be good at surviving and passing on genes. A species that is permanently anxious and discontented will have a higher motivation to watch out for predators and take precautions for survival. But in today's world, these emotions are vicious.

Our biology has barely changed in two hundred thousand years, which means that while sculpture and society has arguably made progress, we are still the same aggressive, jealous, anxious savanna-dwelling hunter gatherers. This is why Pearce argues that if we ever hope to increase the well-being of our species, we will have to edit our genes. Minimizing our suffering and the suffering of those we care about is a crucial part of what drives us. Hence, so-called abolitionists argue that we start using modern technology to do exactly that: minimize and eventually abolish suffering, ushering in an era of so-called super well-being. At present every child is a roll of the genetic dice. Pearce argues that the least we can do is load the dice in our favor to create happier healthier longer living humans but compassion, curiosity and pursuit of knowledge become secondary to a hedonism. If we are all content, why visit the stars? And isn't suffering sometimes a good thing?

These are the three key areas of transhumanist thought and we've only begun to scratch the surface. The three supers: super longevity, super intelligence and super well-being might radically change human history if or when they are realized. One of the main issues facing these transhumanist ideals is it they are seen as far-fetched or perceived as just science fiction but this is a big mistake. We are already transhuman with living longer, integrating more with technology and emphasizing quality of life. We're in the process of redesigning what it is to be human, only the effects are still so subtle and so slow that it doesn't look like much but these changes will come faster and faster and it's only wise to be an active informed participant in the next stage of human development.

**Questions:**

**1***.* What is one basis for the transhumanist thought?

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**2**. What does the writer mean by, “…double standard.” in paragraph 3?

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**3**. True / False

The will and the financial support hinders our fight against aging.

**4**. What does “so” in paragraph 4 refer to?

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**5**. What is the main idea of paragraph 5?

a) Computer technology has witnessed the fastest advancements lately.

b) Human’s integration with technological advancements is likely to accelerate.

c) Advanced technology use is already an integral part of our everyday life.

d) Technology will take over humanity in about less than twenty years.

**6**. What is a fully developed AI (artificial intelligence) likely to do in the future?

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**7**. What word in paragraph 6 means to push, to drive or to force?

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**8**. How does natural selection contradict with modern life?

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**9**. What is the similarity between philosopher David Pearce and so-called abolitionists in terms of their approach to transhumanism?

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**10**. What is the criticism about the three ideals of transhumanism; namely, super longevity, super intelligence and super well-being?

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**………… / 10 points**

**DT – Reading Section - KEY**

1. It considers current trends to see how future technologies will develop and how they might affect us.

OR

It calls for the use of current and upcoming technology to bring about beneficial societal change.

1. 100,000 people really do die every day from diseases caused by aging. However, no one treats aging as a global priority.
2. True / **False** The will and the financial support hinders our fight against aging.
3. (to begin developing technologies) to combat aging
4. b
5. It will quickly become capable of thought for precision, speed and intelligence presently inconceivable to the human mind.
6. propel (v)
7. Natural selection has designed us to be good at surviving and passing on genes even though it may mean passing on such negative emotions (as anxiety and discontented) to next generation, in today's world, these emotions are vicious.
8. They both aim to investigate and phase-out suffering/ minimize and eventually abolish suffering.
9. They are seen as far-fetched or perceived as just science fiction.