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From Self-preservation to Human Enhancement

ABSTRACT

The ancient sages, both in the East and in the West, all taught that we should not harm others, rather we must love our neighbors. But what about loving oneself? In Jahr's discussion on the 5th Commandment as an expression of the moral law, he talked about the duty of self-preservation. He said: "... in Christian perspective every human life as such is morally sacred – including one's own life. Preservation of life – and one's own life not excluded – is a duty." This is an interesting statement. Looking at today's world especially the progress of biomedical technology, human beings have attempted to preserve themselves through the biotechnological enhancement. Is it what Jahr means that we have a duty of self-preservation? This paper will discuss Jahr's view on life preservation and also look at the ongoing debates of human enhancement in the world today.

Key words: moral duty of self-preservation, human enhancement, egoism, altruism.

1. Fritz Jahr's view on moral duty toward oneself

Sanctity of life is the foundation of Jahr's bioethics. Life is sacred therefore we must not harm it. Jahr went further to discuss this imperative from a positive consideration that we must preserve life. This duty of self-preservation is often neglected in the teaching to love others. The question is, if one is not established, how can he or she have the ability to help others establish? If we do not have love, how can we love others?

The teaching of world's ancient sages unanimously accentuated the moral duty of not hurting others, for instance, Moses in his Ten Commandments asserted "thou shall

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not kill”. In Sakyamuni’s ten precepts, he listed “do not take life” as the first charge for his followers to follow. Jesus as well as Confucius also talked about the same thing but not from negative perspective, rather in a positive way: “Love others as you love yourself” or “while you establish yourself, you must also establish others”.

Jahr in his study, the “Three Studies on the Fifth Commandment”, has this to say: “when talking about moral duties, normally we mean duties towards other people in the first place. Routinely we do not consider that each person has moral duties towards oneself as well and that those duties are of immense importance.”¹ The very reason that we must not harm others is because human life as such is morally sacred including one’s own life. Jahr pinpointed: “preservation of life – and one’s own life not excluded – is a duty. And destruction and harm – again, including one’s own life is a moral sin.”² He quoted from the New Testament that St. Paul said: “Don’t you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you? You shall keep God’s temple sacred and not destroy it.” (I Corinthian 3: 16-17).

In applying this commandment to our daily living, Jahr explained that preservation is “not taking one’s own life, not shortening it, not harming or endangering it, not weakening one’s health by unchastity, excesses in eating and drinking, heavy anger, frivolous foolhardiness and daredevilry...”³ Hermeneutically, if one must preserve life by not hurting and destroying it, then we must safeguard, enrich even enhance it.

Today, the development of biomedical sciences has brought us into a new reality, that we cannot only preserve our life, we can even enhance it to make it fuller, stronger, wiser, longer, etc. Could Jahr not envision that such a world was coming in the 21st century? What would he say about all the efforts of humankind’s attempts to enrich itself through modern biomedical technology?

2. Human Enhancement

The rapidly progressing development of biomedical technology enables people to dream of something unimaginable in the past. Most Asian people are born with a single eyelid but nowadays more and more people, especially young ladies, go for cosmetic surgery to create nice-looking eyelids. We heard often in sports news that some athletes used drugs to enhance their performances, such as Ben Johnson, who broke the world record on 100 meter dash in 1988, or the beautiful Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova, who was accused of using forbidden medicine, thus

1 Jahr, Fritz, *Essays in Bioethics 1924-1946*, Lit Verlag, Berlin, 2013, p. 78.

2 Ibid.

3 Id., p. 79.

banned from playing. These are only few instances where the human enhancement has become popular, even fashionable in our modern society.

What is human enhancement? When a person trying to drink coca cola or coffee to keep him awake in order to be sober and energetic to do whatever he is doing, can be a human enhancement. Technology has crept into our daily living and has fortified the human desires to be stronger, prettier, etc. From clinical perspective, a person suffering from failing kidney does not have to die because kidney transplant will save his life. The sloppy person can get a special drink to boost his energy. Medical technology paves the way for humankind to live longer, become healthier, prettier and more intelligent. Human enhancement is a great promise to a new human life.

The general understanding of human enhancement can be defined as any attempt to temporarily or permanently overcome the current limitations of the human body through natural or artificial means.⁴ Erik Parens, on prospect of genetic technology, regards that any of *biomedical interventions used to improve human form or functioning beyond what is necessary to restore or sustain health, can be regarded as human enhancement*.⁵ Human enhancement can be multidimensional. Physical enhancement such as cosmetic, energy boosting by taking drugs to fortify the performance is often brought to our attention. But in reality the medical technology today is attempting to delve into inner secret of life and change human genetic formation.

3. Varieties of human enhancements

From physical perspectives, there are cosmetics such as plastic surgery and orthodontics. For boosting human functions, there are performance-enhancing drugs, prosthetics and powered exoskeletons. From biomedical perspectives, there are embryo selection by preimplantation genetic diagnosis, in vitro-generated, gametes and cytoplasmic transfer such as cell therapy. In mental perspectives, there are neurostimulation, and supplements that improve mental functions. More enhancements in the making include human genetic engineering such as gene therapy, neurotechnology, neural implants, brain–computer interface, cyberware, strategies for engineered negligible senescence, nanomedicine, etc.⁶

4 Cf. “Human enhancement”, http://ieet.org/index.php/tpwiki/human_enhancement, last accessed: October 15, 2016.

5 Parens Eric, “The Goodness of Fragility: On the Prospect of Genetic Technologies Aimed at the Enhancement of Human Capacities”, *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 5(2/1995) pp. 141–153.

6 Ibid.

Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy published in April 2015 lists the following as human enhancement⁷:

- cosmetic surgery and the use of biosynthetic growth hormone to increase stature
- “blood doping” and steroid use to improve athletic endurance and strength
- psychopharmaceutical approaches to increasing memory, elevating mood, and improving cognitive capacities
- genetic and neurological manipulations to increase the human life span, acquire new sensory-motor abilities, and, through “moral enhancement”, live together in more peaceable, generous, and just ways.

Human pursuits for a stronger performance and a better self in life are not only attempted physically and biologically, the enhancement is expanding to include the moral aspect including mood and cognitive enhancement. If the world could become a better place and a person healthier and more loving, these enhancements are by no means good things, but when these technologies will deny human autonomy, become a threat to human dignity, and disrupt natural order, then more serious contemplation will be needed. For instance, the question such as: could we require from an airplane pilot, who flies a plane with hundreds of passengers, to take cognitive-enhancing drug to ensure his sobriety? These are the questions of consent and choice. Could this pilot refuse it? Does he have a choice if he wants to keep his job? Or in a case a person opts for a drastic aesthetical enhancement that runs great risk of failure, should the procedure be undertaken? Here we see the conflicting problem of the principles of medical ethics such as freedom of choice or autonomy and beneficence and non malificence. Is beneficence giving way to autonomy in the face of human enhancement?

Human enhancement raises a hard question of “what is normal”? If health is not the absence of diseases as the WHO defined, human enhancement should be an important part of medical attention in order that a person can be healthy physically, socially and mentally.⁸ Prior to the dawn of modern biotechnology, a person could only exist according to the natural endowment. Today, nature can be altered at our wills and eugenics, which was forcefully criticized before, has crept into our world as fashion. What is the purpose of medicine? Is enhancement a required medical

7 Juengst, Eric – Moseley, Daniel, “Human Enhancement”, in: Zalta, Edward N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/enhancement/>, last accessed: October 15, 2016.

8 Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948., <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html>, last accessed: October 15, 2016.

procedure to save a life? Should there be any limit set on rapid development of biomedical technology? Do we have a duty to live and do we have a duty to die?

4. The debate

Susumu Shimazono, the Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Tokyo has voiced his concern on human enhancement and openly opposed the enhancing drive.⁹ Another scholar in Japan, Naoki Morishita indicated Japanese desires for human enhancement are not only propelled by the technologies and commercial advertisements for a person to become more attractive, in addition, what is at stake is people's fear to fall into conditions of bad health. This fear drives forward the focused desires for enhancement. The bottom line, he indicated, are our desires to be healthier and to possess more strength in life. According to him, these goals are never reachable.¹⁰

Michael J. Sandel of the Harvard University has raised this key point: should those of us who can afford it take advantage of emerging genetic technologies to perfect our minds, bodies and children? He argues in his book, *The Case against perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, that “sex-selection, human and animal cloning, designer eggs, free market eugenics and other forms of biotechnological enhancement threaten our humanity.” He answered the question of hyper-parenting that “we will turn children into objects of manufacture and into commodities... picking and choosing the genetic traits we want in our children rather than as independent persons. That is a risk of turning parenting into an extension of the consumer society.” He continued saying that to appreciate children as gifts is to accept them as they come, not as we might design them.¹¹

Erik Parens raised an issue of vulnerability of life. He said that human beings are creatures that suffer, age and die, and our struggle to deal with this vulnerability is a central aspect of what makes human life valuable.¹² Nobody can escape the aging and dying process of life. Human enhancement may be able to boost person's energy and postpone the onset of the end, but everyone is heading toward the same destination.

9 Shimazono Susumu, “Reasons Against the Selection of Life: from Japan's Experience of Prenatal Genetic Diagnosis”, in: Savulescu Julian – Bostrom Nick (ed.): *Human Enhancement*, Oxford University Press, London, 2015, pp. 291-313.

10 Morishita, Naoki, *Lusting After Health and Being at Ease: A Philosophy of Becoming Well* (Kenkô e no yokubô to 'yasuragi': Uerubikamingu no tetsugaku), Aoki shoten, Tokyo 2003, p. 13.

11 Sandel, Michael J., *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2007.

12 Parens, E., op. cit.

Staying healthy is good and living a fulfilling life is even better, but when we try to beat the flow of nature, we must realize we are fighting against the will of the heaven.

Human enhancement is an effort toward human perfectibility but it involves tradeoffs of you- get- what- you- pay, a commercial business. As the Japanese scholars Shimazono and Morishita indicated, human enhancement becomes a business that may be able to provide something that customers are looking for, but if the extended life span will come with prolonged frailty, suffering and feeling of emptiness, the overall value of the enhancement could be questioned. Is human enhancement therapeutic in accordance with nature of medicine or is it unneeded therapy simply for pleasure?

An appeal for a UN convention on genetic technologies in terms of “the preservation of the human species” as indicated in the article authored by Annas, Andrews, and Isasi in 2002 regards “any intervention that would alter the essence of humanity itself by taking human evolution into our own hands and directing it toward the development of a new species sometimes termed the post-human should be considered a crime against humanity because it would undermine the ‘foundation of human rights’ and set the stage for human extinction.”¹³

On the other hand, bioethicists like Peter Singer and John Harris insist that the traditional western view of sanctity of life has collapsed because it can no longer cope with the array of modern medical challenges, therefore each individual should be respected of his or her choice. Whatever a person decides is good. Harris said that a person is any being who is capable of valuing his or her life.¹⁴ Thus, human enhancement is good and should be encouraged because it is the result of scientific progress and a respect to the principle of autonomy.

From Asian point of view, anything going extreme will set back creating disaster. Therefore, the Confucius taught moderation and the Taoists insist that what is good is to let nature run its course. In other words, following the flow of nature should be the way of humanity.

We, however, cannot stop the development of biomedical technology. More and more breakthrough in technology can be expected in the future beyond our imagination. The Confucian scholars will advocate moderation in whatever we pursue. The book of *Chung Yung* says: “the superior man exemplifies the moderation. The inferior man acts contrary to the means.”¹⁵ *Chung Yung* literally means centrality and universality

13 Annas, George J., with Andrews, Lori B. and Isasi, Rosario M., “Protecting the Endangered Human: Toward an International Treaty Prohibiting Cloning and Inheritable Alterations”, *American Journal of Law and Medicine*, 28 (2/3,2002), pp. 151–178.

14 Watt, John, *The value of life*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985, p. 46.

15 Wing-tsit, Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1963, pp. 98-99.

and its core teaching is moderation. The ordinary principle of the Mean is neither one-sided nor extreme.¹⁶ There should be a boundary that the human set for themselves not to go across, otherwise, as the Taoist says, going extreme is to invite disaster.

The drive for human enhancement will continue but bioethicists must come up with a guideline drawing in public policy and professional practice against particular *degrees* of enhancement, like “species-altering interventions” or “radical enhancements”.

A responsible genetics to defend of our “genetic patrimony” as the “common heritage of all humanity” should be vigorously appealed. In Asian philosophy it is a call for conscientization, meaning that we must be responsible for our fellow human and also for all living beings not only for the present but also for the future.

5. Concluding words from Jahr’s perspective

The future of the world is very challenging indeed. How is humankind going to meet the rise of a new expectation that everyone desires to be prettier, stronger, faster, wiser, and live longer? Is human enhancement a self-preservation? Jahr’s self-preservation, however, has a different purpose from modern social demand. He said: “Whoever fulfills one’s duties towards oneself, avoids many forms of harm to other people.”¹⁷ From Jahr’s perspective, we must ask first what is the purpose of enhancement. If it is to affirm human dignity and fulfill human duties to make our world a better place including all living beings without hurting anyone, then it can be a good self-preservation. On the contrary, if it will deny human dignity and bring destruction to biosphere, it violates the bioethical imperative. If enhancement is to be justified, it must be for enhancing the quality of life to help and protect all life forms. In other words, I live not only for myself but also for others. This brings up a question of egoism and altruism. Jahr discussed these two moral problems within individual ethics and social ethics. Undoubtedly, egoism is selfish and altruism for justice, compassion, pity, love, and etc.¹⁸, but at times egoism can be altruistic at end as Jahr said: “egoism is not without altruistic aspects so is altruism not thinkable without any egoism.”¹⁹ Thus, egoism and altruism are not necessarily incompatible ethical adversaries. It is just like what Confucius said, that while one establishes oneself must help others establish. Jesus’ teaching of “love your neighbors as yourself” reflects the same spirit. You must love yourself in order to love your neighbor. If the purpose of self-preservation is an extension of love and compassion for the sake of

16 Jahr, F., *Essay in Bioethics 1924-1948*, p. 51.

17 Id., p. 79.

18 Id., p. 51.

19 Id., p. 54.

others and for the preservation of a wider community, then it can be altruistic. This may be situational in some respect; therefore, the motivation must be examined and checked to make sure the act is for the betterment of the world and all life. Therefore, human enhancement is not enough, Jahr would call for bio-enhancement, a better living quality for all life forms not only human.

Jahr calls for reasonable and pragmatic use of integrating and complementing mutual aid of supporting each other in a compassionate way of reasoning, feeling and acting. Thus, the act of egoism has its altruistic side in some instance though not most of all. Confucius teaches that one should keep his body intact, because it is a gift from parents and should not alter or damage it. But if donating his organ to save another is a violation of traditional teaching, his donation becomes egoistic but if this egoism is to preserve and enhance another life, it then, is altruistic. Epistemologically speaking, egoism and altruism can only be separated by a thin line although mostly the egoistic act is selfish, the basic line is motivation.

If enhancement is for the sake of preserving self in order to preserve a wider community, it can be beneficial, but also should bear in mind, "respect every living being on principle as an end in itself and treat it, if possible as such."

Od samoočuvanja do ljudskog poboljšanja

SAŽETAK

Drevni mudraci, kako na Istoku tako i na Zapadu, poučavali su da ne smijemo povrijediti druge, štoviše, moramo voljeti svoje bližnje. Ali što o ljubavi prema sebi samome? Jahr u svojoj diskusiji o 5. Božjoj zapovijedi kao izrazu moralnoga zakona govori o dužnosti samoočuvanja. On kaže: „... u kršćanskoj perspektivi svaki je ljudski život kao takav moralno svet - uključujući i vlastiti život. Očuvanje života - a vlastiti život nije isključen - je dužnost“. Ovo je zanimljiva izjava. Gledajući na današnji svijet, posebice napredak biomedicinske tehnologije, ljudi su se pokušali očuvati kroz biotehnoška poboljšanja. Je li to ono što Jahr misli pod time da imamo dužnost samoočuvanja? Ovaj će članak raspravljati o Jahrovu pogledu na očuvanje života te se također osvrnuti na rasprave o ljudskom poboljšanju u današnjem svijetu.

Ključne riječi: moralna dužnost samoočuvanja, poboljšanje čovjeka, egoizam, altruizam.