

Enhancing Humanity or Repeating History: Unravelling the Dystopian Dimensions of Transhumanism in
Ramez Naam's *The Nexus Trilogy*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of transhumanism has gained significant attention lately due to its vision for a techno-utopian future, where the human race transcends its biological limitations and reaches an ideal form of existence. Transhumanists claim that the human physiological limitations make it impossible to unravel the astounding capabilities of human intelligence. They strive to free themselves from this trapped existence by enhancing the human body through exoskeletons, neural interfaces, or gene-editing techniques. While this transhumanist perspective appears phenomenal at a glance, it hides a lot more of the repercussions that can spring out of this seemingly perfect vision. Through an analysis of Ramez Naam's *The Nexus Trilogy*,

this paper explores how the ideals of transhumanism mirror the same destructive ideology that fuelled Nazism and paved way for the mass murder of approximately six million Jews during the Holocaust. The transhumanist quest for enhancing the human race can bring back the dark history when those deemed biologically inferior were killed as cows in slaughterhouses.

Keywords: Transhumanism, Augmentation, Dehumanisation, Nazism, Dystopia

Technology has evolved at a rapid pace in recent years with massive developments in the fields of genetic engineering, artificial intelligence and quantum computing. Advancements in gene-editing technologies, brain-machine interfaces, and nanobots, specifically CRISPR-Cas9, Neuralink, and exoskeletons, hint at the possibility of a future where humans can transcend their biological constraints. Although once focused on eradicating illness and anomalies, the purpose of bioengineering and neurotechnology has long since transitioned towards serving transhumanist ideals, such as attaining immortality, superhuman strength and intelligence. Rather than merely a tool to cater to human needs, technology has now become a means of satisfying mankind's unquenchable desire for perfection. As Yuval Noah Harari writes in his book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*,

Humans are rarely satisfied with what they already have. The most common reaction of the human mind to achievement is not satisfaction, but craving for more. Humans are always on the lookout for something better, bigger, tastier. When humankind possesses enormous new powers, and when the threat of famine, plague and war, is finally lifted, what will we do with ourselves? What will the scientists, investors, bankers and presidents do all day? Write poetry? Success breeds ambition, and our recent achievements are now pushing humankind to set itself even more daring goals (23-24).

Mankind's insatiable quest to perfect themselves has given rise to the transhumanist movement, which envisions a future where cybernetic modifications, neural enhancements, and gene-editing techniques grant humans the immense power to modify themselves. However, this drive for enhancement could exacerbate social inequalities, as it risks creating a world where those who are augmented are considered superior while those without are sidelined. Transhumanism, in a frenzy to evolve into a superior ideal human race with unmatched physical, psychological and cognitive capabilities, is creating new standards of perfection which might inadvertently deem those who are unmodified as unfit, deficient or subpar. It could create new forms of discrimination and social hierarchy, just as the eugenic ideologies of the past labelled the Jews as subhuman. As Joshua Schuster and Derek Woods write in *Calamity Theory: Three Critiques of Existential Risk*, "The first person or group to achieve such technologies and weapons may have the power to dominate or destroy everyone" (38).

In his *The Nexus Trilogy*, Ramez Naam also explores this idea as he imagines a world where the augmented, posthumans with access to sophisticated technology, acquire superior power and control while those unmodified are marginalized, and even considered a major obstacle to societal progress. Ramez Naam is an American writer who is known for his science fictions that speculate the ethical and societal dilemmas that come with cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, brain uploading and brain-machine interfaces. He rose to fame with the publication of his debut novel, *Nexus*, in 2012, and is considered by many as a successor to Michael Crichton. This novel and its sequels, *Crux* and *Apex*, forewarns the dangers of the transhumanist vision of fostering an enhanced race, as it could lead to the emergence of a societal divide or new elitism.

Throughout *The Nexus Trilogy*, readers can find augmented individuals considering themselves too powerful, intelligent and ideal to govern the world, while the unmodified are perceived as obsolete, barbaric and a threat to the progress of human evolution. This is particularly apparent in the words of Shiva Prasad,

a posthuman, when he says in *Crux*, “Humanity has lost control . . . It can no longer govern itself or this planet. It can no longer guarantee its children a future. The world needs new leadership. Posthuman leadership” (118). Shiva’s belief that the unmodified human race is no longer fit for ruling the world is comparable to the viewpoint that ruthless leaders have held throughout history to justify their dominance over the innocents. Adolf Hitler, for instance, justified the mass genocide of Jews by claiming that the Aryan race is pure and superior — whether racially, genetically and intellectually — and that the Jews, Slavs and other marginalized groups are unworthy of existence. Similar instances can also be found in *Nexus* when Su-Yong Shu devises a plan with Kade to exterminate the entire human race to establish a new societal structure in which posthumans hold absolute power and control.

The world needs leaders, Kade, she sent him. After we tear down the old order, there will be a vacuum. Who will rule? . . . You will always be one of the elite.

Ruling . . . he replied. One of the elite . . . Who decides who gets to be part of that elite? he asked her. Who decides which people get uplifted?

Whoever takes the initiative, Kade. Whoever wins the war to come. I intend that to be me. You can be on the winning side . . . The humans are the enemies of the future (Naam 306-07).

Su-Yong Shu’s vision of Kade, herself and other posthuman leaders forming an elite ruling class in a world devoid of those whom she considers inferior mimics the same supremacist views that Hitler had when he intended to create an allegedly perfect society by eradicating Jews and other marginalized groups. In his book *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes, “The stronger must dominate and not blend with the weaker, thus sacrificing his own greatness. Only the born weakling can view this as cruel, but he after all is only a weak and limited man” (285). Though originally intended to perfect humanity, transhumanism can unknowingly sideline those who do not align with its vision, seeing them as a burden to society and ultimately excluding them from political and social spheres. *The Nexus Trilogy* forewarns particularly of this aspect — a future

where those who refuse or cannot afford technological enhancement could be left behind as second-class citizens or even outright exterminated in the name of progress.

In *Crux*, Naam narrates the horrifying incident in which genetically engineered clones murdered their creators and tried to wipe out the entire human race so as to repopulate the world with their master race. Naam calls this the Aryan Rising, further reinforcing the idea that the transhumanist vision of an enhanced race could revive the horrors of genocide that the Nazis once perpetrated in their pursuit of an ideal society — “Then the Aryan Rising clones had been found. The new master race . . . the genetically sculpted children who’d butchered the scientists who’d created them. Who’d released Marburg Red prematurely, eager to see it wipe out the genetically inferior races that populated the planet” (201).

Naam’s *Apex*, the final book in the trilogy, provides another crucial reason for why transhumanist philosophies could pave the way for mass violence. He writes, “We have oppressed those who are different, out of fear. And this fear has been based on deception, and even the murder of innocents” (210). Throughout history, those who viewed themselves as superior have oppressed those they deemed different or inferior, out of fear that they would hinder their progress — whether it was Jews during the Holocaust or Africans during colonisation. The transhumanist vision could also follow this same pattern, as the unmodified individuals will be first categorized as different or outdated, and then laws and policies will be passed that would deny them any social participation. Eventually, they would be branded as the primary cause of social stagnation, with people believing that eliminating them would be necessary for the advancement of civilization. Transhumanism could thus bring back dark history, as the dream of a technoutopian future leads to oppression, dehumanization and extermination.

In his book *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein, Volume 8; The Berlin Years: Correspondence, 1914-1918*, Albert Einstein writes, “All of our exalted technological progress, civilization for that matter, is comparable to an axe in the hand of a pathological criminal” (412). Although transhumanism intends to

create a techno-utopian future through human genetical modification and enhancement, the technology has the potential to bring about a dystopian world in the hands of corrupt individuals. Though developed as a means of enhancing human physical, psychological, and cognitive capabilities, technology can just as easily become a weapon “to control and degrade and enslave” (*Nexus* 245). Transhumanism risks turning individuals into commodities, manipulated by oppressive regimes. While it promises an ideal world where humans can modify themselves as they wish, it can be a facade for dictators who seek to modify people according to their vision. As C. S. Lewis emphasises in his book *The Abolition of Man: Or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*,

Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. We shall have ‘taken the thread of life out of the hand of Clotho’ and be henceforth free to make our species whatever we wish it to be. The battle will indeed be won. But who precisely, will have won it? For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make the other men what they please (37).

Nazi Germany desired to create a so-called perfect human race through compulsory sterilization, euthanasia programmes, and genocide, all under the guise of societal progress. As history has shown, a division between who is fit or unfit has led to mass dehumanization and genocide. If transhumanist technologies fall into the hands of corrupt individuals, they could be honed into a weapon to segregate, enslave and eliminate individuals who are deemed undesirable, much like the eugenic programs of the past. To prevent history from repeating itself, humanity must ensure that technology remains a pathway for progress but not a tool to control, oppress and redefine what it means to be a human.

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