

**Transhumanism, Our Pluralist Moral Duties to the
Poor and How to Effectively Address Global
Poverty**

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Abstract

Prominent transhumanists Julian Savulescu, Ingmar Persson, and Thomas Douglas argue that moral enhancement could solve global poverty. They argue that by engineering individuals with better moral dispositions, they will have better motives, and therefore the will to act more morally. These morally enhanced individuals will more effectively discharge their duties regarding global poverty, thus leading to more rapid poverty alleviation.

In this paper I will present an account of the moral duties wealthy individuals hold to the global poor. These moral duties are not singular (either to do no harm or to provide assistance), but rather are complex and pluralist, and dependent on the position of the agent with regards to the global poor. Further, I will argue that the moral enhancement some transhumanists are envisioning to alleviate poverty fails to recognize the pluralist duties wealthy individuals have regarding poverty alleviation. In fact, moral enhancement would be counterproductive by virtue of i) failing to recognize our various moral reasons to alleviate global poverty ii) failing to allow individuals to evaluate their moral duties to others, therefore to effectively discharge them, and iii) that failing to recognize i) & ii) would bring about morally undesirable consequences; ineffective poverty alleviation and enhanced-individuals' loss of autonomy. Therefore, even if we grant that individuals have only one reason to alleviate global poverty, it is not clear how moral enhancement can effectively address global poverty, since poverty alleviation is an issue that requires political, economic and institutional action.

In the first section of this thesis I will review transhumanism, specifically the "moral enhancement"(ME) proposition. In the second section I will present my pluralist account of the moral duties affluent individuals have to the poor. In the third section, I will analyse the transhumanist's proposal to alleviate global poverty via moral enhancement, and I will contrast their argument with my pluralist account of moral duties in order to determine if ME will achieve poverty reduction.

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Section I

We now stand in the vestibule of a vast new technological age, one that despite its capacity for human destruction, has an equal capacity to make poverty and human misery obsolete. If our efforts are wisely directed—and if our unremitting efforts for dependable peace begin to attain some success—we can surely become participants in creating an age characterized by justice and rising levels of human well-being.

Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 7, 1960.

1. Transhumanism

The definition of transhumanism has been widely revised and it is in constant change in response to technological advances. In the late 1980's an American futurist FM Esfandiary wrote the book "Are you a Transhuman" (1989) where he described the traits and characteristics of "emerging" transhumans. He described this new breed as a mixed group of individuals coming from different backgrounds, countries and professions, with only one thing in common; the use of technology.

A transhuman is a 'transitional human' someone who by virtue of their technology usage, cultural values, and lifestyle constitutes an evolutionary link to the coming era of posthumanity. The signs...indicative of transhuman status included prostheses, plastic surgery, intensive use of telecommunications, a cosmopolitan outlook and a globetrotting lifestyle, androgyny, mediated reproduction (in vitro fertilization), absence of religious belief, and a rejection of traditional family values (Bostrom 2003: 11).

The link between technology and transhumanism was present in earlier definitions, although it is not entirely clear that all the characteristics envisioned by Esfandiary entirely relate to contemporary transhumanism. In other words the usage of the word trashuman in contemporary literature treats technology as a necessary condition of transhumanism. Esfandiary's definition lists characteristics that do not pertain to technology, such as the rejection of religion and family values. Therefore his account is too broad and lacks precision.

Then we are left with the question of what is transhumanism and how does it relate to enhancement. To begin with, in the field of bioethics transhumanism is presently considered a movement that promotes furthering natural human capacities via enhancements. In other words transhumanism purports to modify or alter profound aspects of our normal human capacities, and how we exist as humans. This movement is especially interested in technologies relating to life extension, genetical engineering, and cognitive and moral enhancements. Human enhancement is therefore a tool through which the transhumanist ideals can be achieved. "Transhumanism...promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology. Attention is given to both present technologies...and anticipated future ones" (Bostrom 2003: 493).

Transhumanists view human nature as something that can and should be modified to extend our capacities. In a way they see the natural and normal

human capacities as limitations that can be overcome to satisfy our needs and help us become a new and better type of human.

Transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways. The current state of human beings need not be the endpoint of evolution. Transhumanists hope that through the responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means we shall eventually manage to become post-human, beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have (Bostrom 2003: 493).

2. Intrinsic Vs. Positional Benefits

Transhumanism then is not simply a lifestyle as Esfandiary proposes, but something more profound that requires active engagement with technology which permanently changes human beings. These changes, whether physical or mental, go beyond humans' normal/natural capacities. Some transhumanists (See Bostrom: 2005) have proposed that humans ought to adopt the enhancements with intrinsic benefits and avoid the ones that are simply positional. Enhancements that generate positional advantages only provide an advantage insofar as others lack them. For instance, enhancing humans to be taller only brings a positional advantage to the taller individual because other people are shorter. Conversely, enhancements with intrinsic benefits would provide shared benefits, or as Bostrom calls them "net positive externalities (such as better immune systems)" (2005: 15). Enhancements with intrinsic benefits would primarily deal with life extension; this would

enhance individuals to live longer without deteriorating his/her life quality. Cognitive enhancement would make individuals more intelligent on the assumption that it would lead to better lives. Some philosophers (See Harris: 2011) believe cognitive enhancement is a necessary condition for moral enhancement and argues that in order for individuals to be more moral we ought to improve their reasoning capacities. Others, including Savulescu, Persson and Douglas believe that moral enhancement can be accomplished via regulating certain chemical reactions in the brain to enhance individuals' moral dispositions. Finally, mood enhancements (See Kramer: 1993) would allow individuals to maximize their positive emotions and discount unpleasant ones.

My thesis will not address all of the moral questions raised by transhumanism, nor will it analyse in depth the specifics of all human enhancements. Rather, in what follows, I will explicate specifically moral enhancement (ME) which directly relates to global poverty.

3. Dual-Use Dilemma and Moral Enhancement (ME)

Many existing technologies face the "dual-use dilemma" (See Miller and Selgelid: 2007). This moral dilemma arises when in science and research, technology or information can be used for both moral and immoral purposes. The dilemma is if such technology should be developed and deployed for a good cause when it may also be used to cause great harm. For example, biological research in the field of immunology (vaccines), and the experimentation with new virus' strains could bring great advances in science

and potentially save lives, but could also be used to design and spread deadly diseases.

Some proposed enhancements, such as cognitive enhancement or life extension might also face dual-use dilemmas. Since we live in societies where great social and economic differences exist between countries, it is not only reasonable to be cautious about technologies that can potentially widen the gap between rich and poor, but it is also essential that we promote an egalitarian society using technology as a tool, not solely as a means to further wealthy individuals. For that reason we ought to ensure that such enhancements occur for a moral end, and are not used to harm or to reinforce unequal opportunities between individuals. In the case of ME the proposition is different, because its only goal is to enhance individuals to become more moral. In other words, if ME can fulfil its promise to create more moral humans, and if it is universally applied, then ME would be immune to dual-use dilemmas, since the results of such enhancement can allegedly only bring good/moral consequences. Because some of the moral issues human enhancements raise can be overcome by having morally enhanced individuals undertaking human enhancing procedures, ME is seen by the transhumanists as a priority over other forms of enhancements as it can promote a more just society (Savulescu 2010: 12).

Persson and Savulescu (2010) envision ME being successfully implemented by regulating the neurotransmitter, serotonin, in our brains. They use the example of an “ultimatum game” in which two participants interact to divide

a sum of money. In the game both participants know the total sum, but only one can propose how to split it. If the second participant accepts the money, then they split it according to what the first participant proposed. Savulescu and Persson argue that individuals tend to reject unfair proposals; if the split is not 50/50 the individual prefers to make a statement and punish the unfair offer, even though they receive no money. They further argue that because identical twins, which have been separately brought up, have similar responses in this ultimatum game (Cesarini: 2008), then acts of fairness and justice could be linked to brain responses to serotonin. Therefore they conclude that if we could regulate serotonin in the brain moral enhancement could be achieved.

Douglas (2008) envisions moral enhancement in a different way. He argues that by promoting better future motives, individuals would be morally enhanced. "A person morally enhances herself if she alters herself in a way that may reasonably be expected to result in her having morally better future motives". He understands these future motives to be "psychological — mental or neural — states or processes that will, given the absence of opposing motives, cause a person to act, taken in sum, than she would otherwise have had." (Douglas 2008: 229). According to him ME could be achieved by decreasing the degree of "counter-moral emotions". He identifies two of these emotions, first a decrease in 'a strong aversion to certain racial groups' and second 'the impulse towards violent aggression'. Similar to Savulescu and Persson he thinks that through regulating neurological

reactions and certain neurotransmitters in the brain, moral enhancement technologies could be developed (2008: 233).

Savulescu, Persson and Douglas envision ME as something desirable which would promote pro-social behaviours benefiting society at large. One of the strongest arguments that Savulescu and Persson make is that ME should not be seen as one among many possible enhancements, rather as a separate and more important enhancement. They argue that enhancements in general could be beneficial but only insofar as individuals act more morally. In other words for all enhancements to be successful individuals ought to become more moral, otherwise injustices and inequalities will occur.

Without moral enhancement, other techniques of biomedical enhancement seem likely to increase global injustice. For instance, if any techniques of life extension are discovered, they will probably be employed to further extend the lives of people in the most developed countries, though their lives are already on average almost twice as long as the lives of people in the poorest countries (Savulescu 2010: 13).

Further, Savulescu (2010: 8) explicitly argues that through ME we could solve most of the world's issues, in particular global poverty. He argues that by enhancing humans in the developed world, individuals would be more efficient in discharging their positive duties, hence more willing to donate money. Similarly, Douglas argues that individuals have suboptimal good motives; hence global poverty can be attributed to individuals having these

deficits (2008: 230). Therefore the way he envisions ME not only deals with suppressing counter-moral emotions, but it can also be extended to directly promote pro-social behaviours. In other words, ME could give individuals better motives that would in turn promote actions of assistance and beneficence. Following his argument, morally enhanced individuals that have better motives would perhaps be more empathetic and more likely to assist others.

Savulescu and Persson also favour ME on the basis that it is necessary for any other human enhancements to be morally successful. Their argument draws on Bertrand Russell's essay "Icarus: The Future of Science" (See Bostrom: 2005) where he argues that we should be cautious in the way we accept and implement technologies that can change our humanness. "Without more kindness in the world, technological power would mainly serve to increase men's ability to inflict harm on one another" (Russell: 1924). I would agree that a society where individuals are moral is desirable, and that behaviours that promote fairness and justice would lead to good outcomes. The question is: should a more moral world be brought about through ME or through traditional means of moral education?

4. Objections to ME

Now that we have a clear picture of moral enhancement, I will consider several objections to ME and provide some responses to those concerns in order to determine if they are legitimate and morally significant. After having addressed these objections I will conclude by arguing that the ME envisioned by transhumanists is untenable and morally undesirable.

4.1. Behavioural Genetics and Neuroscience

Chan and Harris (2011) argue that relying on the regulation of serotonin in the brain, for ME to succeed, is a mistake and would in fact be counterproductive. Recent research (Crockett: 2010), which tested if there is a relation between levels of serotonin in the brain and moral behaviour, suggests that regulating serotonin in the brain during "ultimatum games" and "trolley cases" did not lead to pro-social behaviours. In fact in many cases it did not allow individuals to come to the most moral solution. "From the reported research, the effect of serotonin seems to be to make subjects more responsive to immediate emotional engagement and less likely to reason beyond their instant protective reaction" (Harris 2011: 130).

Further, Harris argues that in some circumstances when discounting counter-moral emotions (Douglas) the outcome may be desirable, but in other cases it can be disastrous because it will lead to individuals being unable to effectively respond to specific circumstances. He gives the example of Jasper Schering, a passenger on flight 253, who on December 26 2009 attacked and restrained a hijacker that was attempting to take control of the plane. Because of his violent response he was able to save the lives of hundreds of people. Harris argues that an individual that had been morally enhanced, would not have been able to attack and save the rest of the passengers, instead he perhaps would have been paralysed and unable to react heroically (Harris 2011: 131).

Harris' concerns are persuasive for three different reasons:

1) Counter-moral emotions are not necessarily bad and are often desirable in cases where these emotions are used as a survival instinctive mechanism or to maintain peace and order. Similar to the previous case we could also imagine other cases where a violent reaction is not only permissible but also obligatory. For instance we can think of police officers and soldiers who have a duty to maintain peace, in many cases, with the use of violent force. We may be inclined to think that in some isolated cases the use of violence is permissible but not as a general rule, and that the world would be much less violent with ME. The point is that violence itself is not something morally desirable; it is desirable insofar as it is instrumental in cases like the hijacker or the police officer. The fact that violence can be instrumental and sometimes obligatory should be maintained as part of our own judgment and reasoning, and not simply blocked from our brains. Point three will deal more specifically with the issue of autonomy.

2) The science for successfully implementing ME is underdeveloped and cannot yet fulfil ME's promise. At this point in time we are far from determining how, and if our brains can be induced to make us behave morally. The claim, that regulating serotonin in the brain can make individuals more moral, has been rejected by recent studies. It may be the case that in the future we will be able to accurately determine individuals' moral dispositions however in the present, science cannot yet fulfil ME's promise to make more moral individuals.

3) ME will hinder individuals' capacity to act effectively in any given situation, therefore individuals will partly lose their autonomy. Morally enhanced individuals would react based on what they are programmed to do and would lose the capacity to act based on their own moral reasoning. Similar to the hijacker's case, morally enhanced individuals would not be able to reflect, judge and weigh risks when dealing with situations that require action, and would lose the capacity to fully function as moral agents.

Based on the science and information we have to this day and the moral risk of employing ME when we are uncertain about its full effects renders Harris' concerns well founded and relevant. Therefore, the moral risks of ME might outweigh the benefits.

4.2. ME: An Unnatural Practice

There are two separate objections that argue ME (transhumanism) is unnatural. Both of these objections have been prominently argued by Leon Kass (1997) who served as George Bush bioethics advisor. First, he argues that we should consider our gut reaction of repugnance when thinking about these technologies which is a result of recognizing something that we ought to avoid, as it can dehumanize us by changing "traditional meanings" (life cycle, sex, work).

In crucial cases ... repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power to fully articulate ... we intuit and feel, immediately and without argument, the violation of things we rightfully

hold dear ... To pollution and perversion, the fitting response can only be horror and revulsion; and conversely, generalized horror and revulsion are prima facie evidence of foulness and violation (Kass 1997: 22).

Kass' objection is mistaken because he gives emotions too much importance when determining the moral desirability of ME. We don't want to say that the repugnance and revulsion white people felt towards black people in the antebellum South¹ was an expression of deep wisdom as Kass argues. It is important to consider our emotions as morally significant, that is not to say, they are the sole component of philosophical reasoning. In other words emotions matter, but are not decisive.

The second objection states that it is unnatural to engage with technologies that can change our natural/normal capacities and that this unnaturalness gives individuals reasons not to engage in ME. To address this claim I will use J. S Mill's concept of naturalness (1904). He argues that the concept of nature has two principal meanings and that these are often misrepresented. The first meaning says that nature is “the entire system of things, with the aggregates of all their properties”. The second is a meaning “that denotes things as they would be, apart from human intervention” (1904: 21). In the first, he argues that it is a mistake to think that humans can create unnatural things, because nature and what is natural is everything, simple or complex

¹ Period of time (1781-1860) in the United States of America when slavery was widely used.

where all phenomena take place. Therefore, all men's actions are, in one way or another, a manifestation of nature, because men have only power to do what is natural. "Nature, then, in this, its simplest, acceptance, is a collective name for all facts, actual and possible..." he further says "For, in the sense of the word "nature" which has just been defined, and which is the true scientific sense...everything which is artificial is natural" Mill (1904: 3).

In the second meaning he argues that it is irrational and immoral to accept that man ought to follow nature, because all human actions, one way or another, consist in altering the spontaneous course of nature (1904: 22). Mill's account focuses on an important point regarding our perception of what is permissible based on what is natural, and how that perception is somewhat arbitrary. Following his account, it would be a mistake to reject the whole notion of transhumanism on the basis that it is unnatural, and if we do, we then have to reassess every aspect of the way we live in today's societies. For instance if we consider the transhumanist proposition of "life extension" to be an unnatural technology, we would then be committed to think that using technology such as medicine to heal, which equals life extension to also be unnatural. So far these two objections of transhumanism, one based on repugnance and the other on naturalness, do not provide valid moral reasons to reject ME and more work needs to be done to substantiate their claims against the transhumanist's proposals.

There is another argument that draws upon the naturalness concept but from a different angle. This argument focuses on a contentious distinction between

treatment and enhancement, which some argue is morally significant (See Kass: 2003). Kass holds the view that treatment is permissible and enhancement is not, on the basis that treatment is something that is restoring a human to its natural condition, that is, medication even if considered artificial is simply restoring humans to their natural state. Contrary to that view others such as Roache and Bostrom (2008) argue that a moral distinction between treatment and enhancement simply does not exist. They argue that if those who encourage that distinction refer to the average human capacities as natural, then, their argument is irrational and implausible, because they will have to provide answers where the natural is also not the average. Consider the following example: The average intelligence of a person is 90-110 IQ. If an individual is born with an IQ of 130 (higher than average), and later in life develops a condition that decreases her IQ to 110, the individual's natural cognitive capacities when she was born (130 IQ) went beyond the average human, and if we could treat the condition that made her IQ decrease, would we consider that an enhancement because it is making her more intelligent than the average person or should we deny a treatment based on her IQ now placing her within the average? For people like Kass who hold that a distinction between treatment and enhancement exists, they will be obligated to provide answers in cases like this, where what is natural is also not the average. More importantly it fails to recognize three things 1) the capacities of individuals cannot be measured by an average count, 2) that these vary between different individuals, and 3) that these fluctuate throughout the lifespan of individuals. Therefore the treatment vs. enhancement distinction

does not offer a tenable objection against trashumanism, and it is only problematic to those who hold it exists (Bostrom: 2008).

Defining the therapy-enhancement distinction is a problem only for those who maintain that this distinction has practical or normative significance. Those who hold that therapy is permissible, or worthy of support, or an appropriate target for public funding, but that enhancement is not, are affected by all the difficulties mentioned above...Transhumanists (advocates of human enhancement) are unaffected by the problems associated with maintaining that there are important differences between enhancement and therapy (Bostrom 2008: 3)

We may think the above distinction is not entirely based on a simple dichotomy, rather, that a consideration ('internality constraint') is also needed to distinguish between enhancements and treatments. This consideration differentiates between treatment and enhancements on the basis that enhancements require an "internal" (body) intervention. If we want to maintain this consideration, then we are faced with the problem of how internal an intervention needs to be for it to be counted as an enhancement. For instance, there are some practices such as wearing glasses that enhance our sight, but what is the difference, morally speaking, between wearing glasses and having surgery to permanently improve our sight? If we maintain that a moral distinction exists between enhancements and treatments based on the former being an internal procedure in the body, hence morally

undesirable, then we will be committed to denying lifesaving procedures. Therefore, it is not clear why or if a distinction that is morally significant exists that relies on an “internality constraint”. These previously discussed arguments against transhumanism based on an internality constraints and the treatment vs. enhancement distinction do not provide enough reasons to successfully reject the transhumanist claim. (Bostrom: 2008)

The objections previously presented are focused on concepts of what constitutes the "natural". The objections towards the desire to enhance our human capacities are often presented with an undertone that implies a somehow forbidden act of "playing god". That is not to say that all objections to transhumanism are unfounded or invalid, simply that the ones focused on naturalness, a treatment vs. enhancement distinction and that hold an “internality constraint” are not morally persuasive.

4.3. Transhumanism Promotes Inequalities and Abuse

It is reasonable to think that transhumanism may increase inequality, since the technologies that have the potential to make fundamentally different humans, could possibly promote a greater separation between rich and poor, and perhaps even the subjugation of those most vulnerable². Technology and its availability/accessibility is very much related to the economic power of a country. For that reason in today's world we could expect only some

² For a further discussion on how technology is widening the gap between rich and poor see Emeagwali “Around the Globe, Technology Widens Rich-Poor Gap” (2009)

individuals to benefit from new technologies. This raises important moral issues that perhaps are not inherent to transhumanism but that still need to be considered and that inevitably, based on today's societies, could lead to more social inequalities. (See Silver: 1998)

Other bioethicists such as Annas, Andrews and Isasi (2002) have been critical about transhumanism on the basis that creating a new species would promote conflict and even genocide. They say that if we develop humans that are more intelligent or moral, it would not only make a greater gap between rich and poor but also create a new and more profound gap between the enhanced new species and the "normal" human. The former would most likely be treated as an inferior species; therefore they could be considered savages and might be subjected to slavery and slaughter.

These are legitimate concerns and based on the long record of human history where vulnerable individuals and groups have been subjected to exploitation and domination. We could reasonably expect this tendency to continue. Suppose that in the near future, we discover a costly way to make individuals more intelligent, only affordable to the very wealthy. These newly enhanced individuals would differ from the majority of the world's population. This enhancement would be a type of "positional advantage" which would give them a benefit insofar as others lack it. Therefore we could reasonably expect those individuals to use their enhanced capacities for their own benefit and perhaps even for domination.

Savulescu might respond to this particular problem saying that ME should be immune to these objections, because ME should precede any other type of enhancements. Before individuals are enhanced to be more intelligent they will first be more moral. The problems with Savulescu's view are 1) it is unlikely that all individuals will be morally enhanced before they are cognitively enhanced, 2) there would be significant incentives to undergo cognitive enhancement first, and 3) if only some people can be cognitively enhanced, because of its cost, then they would be likely to mistreat the non-enhanced. This does not mean that the objection of transhumanism promoting inequalities renders ME invalid, simply that we have to recognize that these are legitimate concerns that we ought to consider prior to engaging in any form of human enhancement.

4.4. Means and Ends

The last objection to transhumanism, which directly relates to ME, is the notion that the process by which individuals accomplish their goals is morally significant. Kass (2003) argues that individuals, while learning and improving themselves, consider their achievements to be important and perhaps even more important is the process by which they accomplish these achievements. For example an individual that is trying to become more intelligent by exercising his brain through solving mathematical problems. The process that this individual goes through, of laborious study, reflection and even struggle has a direct relationship to what the individual is setting up to achieve. Thus, there is something morally important about the process. Kass argues that if that achievement is simply accomplished via human enhancement the morally

significant process, which allows individuals to self-reflect, set goals, and so on, is lost.

In most of our ordinary efforts at self-improvement, either by practice or training or study, we sense the relation between our doings and the resulting improvement, between the means used and the end sought. There is an experiential and intelligible connection between means and ends; we can see how confronting fearful things might eventually enable us to cope with our fears. We can see how curbing our appetites produce self-command. ... In contrast, biomedical interventions act directly on the human body and bring about their effects on a subject who is not merely passive but who plays no role at all. He can at best feel their effects without understanding their meaning in human terms. (Kass 2003: 22)

Bostrom argues that as long as the end goal is valuable, the process by which it is achieved is not relevant. In other words, the end result (goal) has value "independently of the means it was achieved" (2008: 13). By that he means that, for example, if an individual is trying to lose weight and decides to go through surgery which makes the individual achieve that goal in a matter of hours, then the goal in itself has an independent value from the process, even if that person did not go through the traditional process of dieting, exercise etc. Further, that frequently individuals act not based on the value of what a particular process might bring, rather on the end result, like when we catch the bus instead of walking. In this case perhaps walking could bring extra

value to the individual but there is an independent value in arriving faster and on time to work.

Kass argues the process matters, while Bostrom argues the end goal matters. Both are right. But Bostrom is saying as long as the end goal is valuable, we should do it. Kass would argue that we should not abandon the value in the process, even if there is an end goal value. I find Bostrom's argument mistaken for three reasons. 1) He fails to realize that there is a direct relation between means and ends, which are dependent on one another. That is, if the individual sets a goal to lose weight but instead of jogging to work catches the bus because she knows that on the bus she can get a "magic" pill that will do the job, then we can say she has lost something valuable by taking the bus, namely the process of working towards ones ends, even if she achieves the ultimate goal. Bostrom fails to make that important distinction between working through ones means/ends and something that is simply valuable in itself. We can mostly agree that jogging to work is healthier than driving, but this is only relevant in our conversation if my goal is to lose weight or exercise, and not if it is to arrive early to work. Conversely if my goal is to arrive early to work, then perhaps what is valuable is not jogging but driving. 2) Recent studies suggest that working through ones goals offers an important educational value (See Berns: 2004). A study in which individuals that had to work and struggle to earn money rather than just receiving it as a gift, showed more areas of brain activity and felt happier, suggesting that working through ones goals has moral significance. 3) If I draw a parable between Bostrom's argument (ends having an independent value) and poverty alleviation, we can

identify how important the value of the process is. For instance if we decide to address global poverty by providing mosquito nets to poor individuals, we would agree that the end goal (to provide as many mosquito nets as we can) is valuable in itself, but we cannot ignore that the value of the process is as important as the end goal. If the process to give away the mosquito nets is done indiscriminately we could be affecting local industries, the recipients of the nets might not value what they have been given, and in the future they might expect more handouts instead of working themselves to improve their lives (See Duflo: 2011). Since there is a direct relation between means and ends, the process to achieve our ends cannot be simply dismissed as Bostrom argues. It is then clear that there is a moral value in working through ones ends. This is not to say categorically that ME would deny individuals the opportunity to experience the process of working through ones ends. Simply it is to argue that what Savulescu and Douglas envision for ME makes individuals insensitive towards the value of the process, and it denies them from valuing it, which in the case of poverty alleviation, can have morally undesirable consequences.

5. Conclusion

Transhumanism proposes that it is morally desirable for humans to transcend their normal capacities by the use of enhancements. Based on that premise transhumanism faces the following objections: 4.1. The science that transhumanism uses to support its premises is underdeveloped, hence morally risky, 4.2. Transhumanism is unnatural, 4.3. Transhumanism promotes

inequalities and abuse, and 4.4. Transhumanism fails to recognize the interdependent value of "means and ends".

Based on the previous assessment and how transhumanism/ME responds to these objections, I do not object to transhumanism as a whole, nor I argue that the implausibility of ME is absolute. Simply that at this point in time ME will struggle to live up to the transhumanists' expectations. Perhaps the objections that are raised against ME can easily be outweighed if ME can fulfil its promise to solve one of society's most pressing issues, namely, global poverty.

Section II

Savulescu, Bostrom and Persson argue that through ME individuals will be able to discharge their moral duties better or act more morally. They envision that once individuals are enhanced they will have the will to act against poverty by becoming more beneficent and empathetic, and will be able to alleviate global poverty by effectively discharging their beneficence to the poor. The transhumanists' view is exclusively focused on positive duties (the moral duty to assist others), and it strongly suggests that global poverty is an issue that can simply be solved through the actions of individuals in affluent nations. In what follows I will present my pluralist account of the moral duties affluent individuals have to the poor, the extent of those duties, and how they ought to be discharged effectively. In this account I will show how the moral responsibilities and duties affluent individuals have to the poor are not determined by a single-factor (beneficence). Wealthy individuals' moral duties to the poor should be sensitive to a) the degree to which the agent has caused the harm, b) the degree to which she intended it, c) the epistemic limitations she faced in undertaking the action, and d) the capacity she has to help.

6. Moral Duties to the Poor

One philosophical debate concerning global poverty is about the type of moral reasons affluent individuals have for addressing global poverty. These moral reasons are commonly seen as two kinds. First, some reasons are seen as morally stringent based on a causal connection between the duty bearer

and the deprived individual, in which the individual's poverty is a result of an action or group of actions done by the duty bearer. A second class of moral reasons is duties of assistance. These duties are non-relational. That is, the duty bearer owes assistance to the deprived individual independently of any causal or associational relationship they might have. The former set of duties is usually referred to as negative duties³ which wealthy individuals have to the poor based on the harms they have committed. The latter sets of duties are usually referred to as positive duties which wealthy individuals have towards the poor based on principles of assistance.

7. Positive Duties

One widely endorsed position is that affluent individuals have moral duties to the poor grounded on principles of beneficence and assistance. These principles are understood as the capacity an agent has to prevent harm from happening. It is commonly thought that duties of assistance are not legally binding, therefore can be exercised at the individual's discretion. In other words, these duties are grounded on promoting the good of others, and are mostly understood as acts of altruism (See Beauchamp: 2008).

³ The stringency of these duties in how they are weighed against another is often debated, although in this essay I will refer to the "moral asymmetry principle" by which a duty to assist is less stringent than a duty not to harm. That is to say, that if two proportionate variables exist, one a duty to assist and another not to harm, it is usually understood that the duty not to harm is more stringent.

There are two views about duties of assistance. On one hand, Kantians argue that acts of beneficence and generosity are not morally obligatory (stringent), although desirable, they cannot be forced upon individuals. "Because we cannot be compelled to adopt ends, but must do so from free choice...we must impose them on ourselves." (Homiak: 2011) On the other hand, Singer (2009) makes a stronger claim by arguing that we are morally required to discharge our duties of assistance, because there is no clear moral distinction between contributing to harm, and failing to assist. Hence individuals have very demanding duties of assistance. The notion that moral duties of assistance are stringent and morally obligatory is not exclusive to Singer. Others like Unger (1996) have argued that wealthy individuals have strong obligations to donate money to the poor, and that our moral intuitions, when it comes to poverty alleviation, are often flawed, although, for the purpose of this paper I will focus on Singer's argument.

Singer argues that positive duties are stringent and demanding and that making a moral distinction based on causal contributions is a mistake and goes against our moral intuitions. He grounds his argument on the following case of the helpless drowning child. An individual happens to be passing by, but he is late for a meeting and wearing expensive clothes. If he saves the child his clothes might get wet and he might be late for his meeting. Singer argues that the individual, without having to sacrifice anything morally comparable to a child's life, ought to save the child. Based on that conclusion he uses an analogy to then say that saving a drowning child is akin to saving

the global poor, hence, by donating money we are morally required to stop global poverty.

First premise: Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.

Second premise: If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so.

Third premise: By donating to aid agencies, you can prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, without sacrificing anything nearly as important.

Conclusion: Therefore, if you do not donate to aid agencies, you are doing something wrong (Singer 2009: 21).

I will present two objections against Singer's argument. First, I object to his monist account of moral duties. Second, I argue he oversimplifies a complex issue, leaving most of the essential components that can morally help assess the situation absent and presupposes that complex problems have simple solutions (See Wisor: 2011).

His first argument is problematic because he assumes that global poverty is solely an issue of wealthy individuals extending their altruism, rather than a political one. Similar to the "shallow pond case" there are plausible cases in which our moral contributions to some individuals are exclusive to duties of beneficence, for example, when a poor country suffers from a catastrophic

natural disaster. Here we can grant that wealthy individuals' moral duties to the poor (in this specific case) are solely based on positive duties. However, it is a mistake to generalize our moral duties to the poor as being exclusively positive, because it ignores important considerations as to the state of the deprived individual, the cause of his state, and what or who brought it about. Also, there are many instances in which the state of the poor has come about from direct contributions of harm by other individuals. The state of the poor is seldom a case of bad luck, it is mainly human-driven (see Pogge: 2005). For example, we can think of an individual(s) that endangered a natural resource from a poor community in a foreign country because of reckless actions. The actions of this individual have worsened the situation of that community by making them poorer. According to Singer the moral duties wealthy individuals hold to the poor are demanding, and individuals have a moral obligation to donate money to alleviate poverty. The problem is the average wealthy individuals extending their altruism have not caused the impoverishment of that community. That is not to say, that wealthy individuals do not have a moral duty to assist those in need, simply that it is important to maintain that the culpable actor has more stringent moral obligations to rectify his wrongdoing, otherwise it is likely that moral obligations will shift to innocent actors.

The second objection against Singer's account is that acting from the monist position will result in less poverty reduction. To better understand the moral importance of these objections, consider the following example: Imagine an individual X walking down the road; he happens to see an individual Y that

has been brutally assaulted by another individual Z. Y needs immediate medical assistance. The options that X faces are (i) he can assist or (ii) he can do nothing about it and let Y die. This, like the shallow pond case, shows that we have a stringent duty to assist, but what is equally important is that we enquire and investigate who committed such wrongdoing (assuming that it was not in self-defence). This is important due to the fact that we as society do not want such wrongdoings to keep occurring; therefore by simply assisting we are not solving the real problem, namely capturing a killer on the loose. We can say the same about global poverty; we need to acknowledge that to properly assign moral responsibility we ought to clearly define who, if anyone, is contributing to the state of the poor in order to rectify it.

Singer's monist account is also too strong, because a) it argues that a lack of beneficence from affluent individuals is equivalent to killing the poor. This makes his argument overly demanding and gives individuals immoderate responsibilities (See Barry and Øverland: 2011) and b) it equally assigns moral duties/obligations indiscriminately to all affluent individuals. If we grant that different actors hold dissimilar moral responsibilities, then failing to do so, will ineffectively distribute moral obligations, ask for retribution from the wrong agent, and leave morally culpable agents unpunished.

That is not to say, positive duties do not have a moral significance. The "shallow pond case" presents how these duties are intuitive and can be demanding depending on the context. Therefore, it is plausible to think that we as affluent individuals can contribute to the alleviation of poverty and that

in some instances the moral duties we have to the poor are based on positive duties, but it is implausible to assume that the moral duties we share to the poor are exclusively of one kind.

8. Negative Duties

Negative duties are understood as duties to not harm, or to not violate others rights. In other words, negative duties instantiate moral agents' claims to not be harmed. These claims are often understood as being more stringent than positive duties by virtue of causally contributing to harm. Because of that causal contribution to harm they attract more stringent moral responsibilities. For instance if I push an individual off his bicycle, we think that the individual is injured because of my actions, therefore I have stringent moral obligations to compensate or rectify the situation. Whereas a bystander to this accident would have a weaker positive duty, namely to assist.

When distributing moral duties, if there is a causal relationship between the actor, the action he undertakes and the consequence of the action, then it is understood that his action brings special (demanding) moral obligations. For instance Young argues that "all who participate by their actions in processes that produce injustice share responsibility for its remedy" (Young 2006: 125). Similarly, Thomas Pogge (2002) argues that in the case of poverty, wealthy individuals are not simply bystanders as in the bicycle example; instead they

have contributed to the impoverishment of individuals by upholding and forcing a political system, which only favours the rich⁴.

The normative force of others' human rights for me is that I must not help uphold and impose upon them coercive social institutions under which they do not have secure access to the objects of their human rights. I would be violating this duty if, through my participation, I helped sustain a social order in which such access is not secure, in which blacks are enslaved, women disenfranchised, or servants mistreated (Pogge 2002: 66).

He argues that global institutions have contributed to, and keep contributing to harm by employing policies that primarily benefit affluent individuals. According to him it is feasible to have an institutional order that does not deprive individuals from their rights and also one that avoids foreseeable and avoidable harms. "This institutional order is implicated in the reproduction of radical inequality in that there is a feasible institutional alternative under which such severe and extensive poverty would not persist. The radical inequality cannot be traced to extra-social factors (such as genetic handicaps or natural disasters) which, as such, affect different human beings differentially" (Pogge 2002: 199)

⁴ For the purpose of this essay I will only focus on Pogge's negative duties account.

Further, a way for affluent individuals to stop contributing to the harm of the poor can be done by reforming what he calls the three Ps. The first P he talks about, refers to wealthy nations protecting their markets from poor nations' cheap imports. The second refers to the invalidation of the international borrowing and resource privileges, which the economic global system confers to any state that comes into power by any means necessary. Finally, the third refers to a reformation of the pharmaceuticals' industry so instead of profiting from strict patent protections, to profit in proportion to the health impact of the drug they have developed. These reforms will stop wealthy individuals from further harming the poor. (See Jaggar: 2010)

Pogge's account accurately illustrates a type of moral duty, based on harming contributions by wealthy individuals to the poor. Although, not because he only focuses on negative duties and does not specifically addresses if individuals have positive duties to the poor, we can assume that we only have one reason to alleviate poverty or that most of our actions of altruism are in fact actions of compensation. Also his argument focuses on the international economic order; nonetheless he asserts that private individuals share a violation of a negative duty even if a causal connection cannot be explicitly attributed to specific individuals. "As ordinary citizens of the rich countries, we are deeply implicated in these harms. We authorize our firms to acquire natural resources from tyrants and we protect their property rights in resources so acquired. We purchase what our firms produce out of such resources and thereby encourage them to act as authorized." (Pogge 2002: 142). The generalization he makes of all citizens sharing equal moral

obligations, clouds the way in which moral obligations should be distributed effectively. Since residents of wealthy states are heterogeneous and have undertaken more or less harmful actions through the government that represents them. In other words, it is not clear that they share the same moral duties based on their unique contributions. For that reason, generalizing a violation of negative duties to state and individuals is a mistake, because we are left with an unattainable notion that cannot provide any normative guidance for private individuals.

It is conceivable that individuals might escape this responsibility by withdrawing from that order, emigrating, or becoming hermits, but in the real world these possibilities are feasible for few people, if any. Pogge argues that the best way of alleviating our culpability for global poverty is to diminish the injustice of the international institutions...through three independent institutional reforms that he calls minor. (Jaggar 2010: 5)

His account assumes that because individuals (western societies) have elected the government that represents them, they should share responsibility of the actions of the state and its institutions. The problem is that it is unfair to many. Some individuals might do whatever is in their power to support the reforms Pogge argues about; although that does not mean that the reforms will be created. If they are not, and because of that, it is proven that poor individuals have been further affected, then it is not clear why all wealthy individuals should share similar moral obligations to compensate the poor.

Clearly the solution cannot be for individuals in that position to become hermits. Perhaps we simply need to distribute moral obligations more effectively.

I have two concerns about Pogge's appeal to the causal contribution principle: one empirical, and one philosophical. Empirically, it is extremely difficult to determine the main causes of global poverty as well as dubious that most world poverty is the effect of global institutions. Philosophically, even if the principle were true, the extent of "our" responsibility for global poverty is complicated by our diverse agency relationships to institutions. (Satz 2005: 48)

However, Pogge's argument is plausible in some contexts. In some instances it could be possible to identify a causal connection between affluent individuals, global poverty and harming contributions. His account also reminds us of injustices the global economic order has perpetuated to the poor. "Pogge's strategy is appealing, not least because it accords with the widespread sense that there is something deeply unjust about many of the international institutions that have been established and supported by the rich countries" (Patten 2005: 21)

9. Pluralist Duties

Rubenstein (forthcoming) presents a pluralist account on the moral duties individuals hold when addressing global poverty. She argues that the moral duties individuals hold are not simply based on a single kind (positive or

negative). Rather she grounds moral duties based on "actor centred questions" and "case centred questions". Actor-centred questions look at responsibility from the point of view of a specific actor and ask what actions the actor should prioritize when there are different actions to undertake. Case-centred questions try to find who is responsible between different actors and their degree of responsibility, for global poverty, to precisely determine moral obligations. She argues that thinking of moral duties in terms of positive and negative duties is misleading. For instance there are cases in which it is morally better to discharge a positive duty (often thought of as less stringent than a negative duty) than to rectify an action that came to be from a direct harm.

The type of questions she asks allow individuals to better determine the degree of responsibility, responsible actors, and what actions to prioritize when deciding on poverty alleviating activities, and also allows for a better understanding of the various reasons to address poverty. It also highlights, unlike the monists, that moral duties ought to be recognized in context. The moral obligations that arise from this process recognize that it cannot be assumed that individuals should hold the same reasons to alleviate poverty, because different considerations help determine moral obligations. Finally she argues that efficiency should also be considered and given a special status over other considerations. That is when deciding what alleviating actions to undertake, the agent should prioritize the action that can maximally alleviate poverty.

Even though I sympathize with her pluralist account and find it persuasive. I want two qualifications on her position. 1) Efficiency should not have a special status, but rather an equal status with other considerations, and 2) Context matters a great deal in determining a particular agent's duties. On the first qualification she argues "Acting on causality-based reasons will also likely lead the actor to alleviate less poverty overall than will acting on efficiency-based reasons, because only the latter type of reason focuses entirely on maximally alleviating poverty" (forthcoming: 4). I grant that acting on causality-based reasons will not always trump acting on beneficence reasons, that is if the severity of the actions the agent has to undertake are disproportionate. To make this clear I will use her following question as an example. Should a government prioritize aid to a country that it invaded and occupied on false pretenses even though such aid might be inefficient in terms of cost, or should it instead use that money to aid people elsewhere where it could more effectively alleviate severe poverty? (Forthcoming: 17) If we hold that efficiency reasons have a special status, and that acting on these reasons is more effective in alleviating poverty, then we could expect aid to go where it can do more good. Perhaps there are other actions that the agent can undertake that are maximally more efficient, even where we may not have causality-based reasons, than repairing damage that we have caused with our direct actions, but if the severities of both actions are equal and proportionate, as well as the other considerations, then the actor ought to prioritize and act on causality-based reasons, even if it will not maximally alleviate poverty. A consideration of maximal/efficiency

should not have a higher "special status" (forthcoming: 33) than other considerations.

Overall, the considerations that she presents offer a better solution to what the monists argue, but in presenting these considerations it is important that the context dictates the priorities of which poverty alleviating actions to undertake, the same way we will not say a negative duty is always more stringent than a positive. Similar to Barry's contribution principle (2005), we have to add up all the components and considerations to better determine moral obligations. Therefore, maximal/efficiency should only play a role equal to other considerations (causality, intent, and so on). To make this clearer, consider the following example. An agent polluted a water reservoir in a foreign developing country, because of that the small community became more impoverished and their livelihoods are at risk. The culpable agent knows that cleaning the water reservoir will take a great sum of money and time. At the same time, a more populated neighbouring community has suffered from a malaria outbreak which is threatening the lives of thousands. The agent knows that providing mosquito nets to mitigate the epidemic will only cost a fraction of cleaning the water reservoir, and will also save more lives. The agent decides to provide mosquito nets claiming that it will maximally alleviate suffering.

The agent in this case has a dual moral-duty, one to provide assistance and the other of reparation. As previously mentioned it is not always the case that violating a negative duty is more demanding than providing assistance. In both the water reservoir and malaria outbreak cases, it seems that inaction can

kill hundreds if not thousands of people. In this case there two reasons for the agent to act on maximally/efficiency reasons 1) To alleviate more poverty, and 2) To save money and perhaps evade his moral obligations.

If we are dealing with a moral agent, then he would most likely do both, repair the water reservoir, and provide as much aid as possible to the neighbouring community. If we are dealing with an immoral agent, then he would most likely focus on saving money and evade his other moral obligations. My concerns to reach a conclusion that gives maximal/efficiency a special status when deciding what action to undertake, and when wealthy agents have directly contributed to the impoverishment of poor individuals are twofold. 1) History has shown that wealthy individuals profiting in developing countries often prioritize economic gain over moral reasons⁵. Therefore it is morally risky, and could easily let wrongdoers off the hook when it comes to their moral obligations. 2) There is something valuable about repairing, and compensating the damages one has created, not only to the culpable agent but also to the victim. Imagine that in the previous case the agent decides to provide cheap mosquito nets to the neighbouring community and then claim insolvency; forcing other agents to clean the mess they causally created. Even if other agents come in to fulfill the other individual's moral obligations, then the victims and community will be left with a feeling of injustice and impunity.

⁵ See Iris Young (2006) specifically her account of sweatshops in developing countries.

In the previous case it would be more desirable for the agent to repair the damages he created, and if it is possible, to then provide assistance to the neighbouring community. We have to remember that when it comes to actions of assistance, individuals in all places have a duty to assist, so even if one agent legitimately cannot provide aid, then the others that can should.

Although Rubenstein's account gives an unnecessary special status to maximal/efficiency poverty alleviating reason, she presents an accurate account of the considerations we ought to take to effectively distribute moral obligations. An effective way to do that is to acknowledge that the multiple actions of individuals and the states that represent them give rise to a range of moral reasons that determine overall obligations to poor individuals. Because individual agents have differential obligations, and both positive and negative duties apply to individuals, we cannot accept only one reason to avoid global poverty that a) reduces to either harm or assistance and b) that treats all individuals of affluent states equally. Due to these shortcomings, it is necessary to implement a pluralist account that recognizes multiple and sometimes conflicting duties.

10. The considerations we ought to take to determine moral obligations should be plural and sensitive 1) to the degree to which the agent has caused the harm, 2) the degree to which she intended it, 3) the epistemic limitations she faced in undertaking the action, and 4) the capacity she has to give.

10.1. Causality

A moral reason that grounds affluent individuals' duties to the poor is based on their actions that have causally created poverty or affected poor individuals (See Rubenstein). This reason is important to effectively determine moral obligations. Like the previous case of polluting the water reservoir in a poor community, the individual(s) responsible for this action has more stringent moral obligations than an individual that had nothing to do with the accident.

10.2. Right Intention

Individuals have stringent moral obligations if the actions they undertake intend to cause poverty. This consideration goes hand in hand with the previously presented causality-based reason. In one sense individuals can undertake an action that inadvertently causes poverty. In a second sense, individuals can undertake an action intending to cause poverty but not succeeding. And in a third sense, an individual can undertake an action intending poverty and succeeding. All three cases generate various moral obligations. The case where poverty is caused as an accident brings only moral obligations insofar as to mend the damage. However if poverty arises as a result of an action intending to cause that poverty, we can expect stringent moral obligations and compensatory actions from the culpable agent(s). "The issue of intentions is relevant to the issue of global poverty because many actors, ranging from states to corporations, have an interest in keeping particular groups powerless— which often means keeping them poor." (Rubenstein forthcoming: 10)

10.3. Epistemic Obligations

This condition refers to individuals having a moral obligation to find out certain things, which are sensitive to context and what is at stake, morally speaking. This moral requirement pertains to the moral obligations, which we ought to fulfil in order to discount the risk of violating a negative duty. "The thought here is that when making certain sorts of decisions, or preparing to take certain sorts of actions (or to refrain from taking certain actions), what is required of us from an epistemic point of view may be sensitive to what is at stake from a moral point of view" Guerrero (2007: 68).

For instance, a group of individuals decide to open a factory in an impoverished country. The operation of the factory requires the use of large quantities of water, which they acquire from the local well. After a few months the well runs dry and the impoverished locals have no other source of water in the vicinity. Let us also think that after the well runs dry, the factory owners argue that they did not know that the well had only small quantities of water.

In this case we could agree that it may be the case that the factory owners did not know the natural resource was limited, but also that we could reasonably think that the moral risk of running the well dry is significant because it can affect the economy of the town, the livelihood of the locals and even put individuals' lives at risk. Therefore, the epistemic moral obligations of the factory owners to investigate must be sensitive to the context of the situation (moral risk). In this case to at least find out the likelihood of the well running

dry, the effect it can have on the locals, and finally to act based on those findings.

When dealing with epistemic moral obligations and the degree to which individuals are expected to investigate, it is not easy to determine when they are sufficient and reasonable. Therefore in order to assess moral culpability or harm contribution based on epistemic obligations, we could say that an individual is morally culpable if he/she is guilty of ignorance from where he/she acts, which is sensitive to context⁶. That is, moral assessment should not be sensitive only to the information a person had when acting, but more importantly, to the obligations individuals have to become informed based on the situation's moral risk (See Guerrero: 2007).

10.4. Capacity to Effect Change

A fourth moral reason that grounds affluent individuals' duties to the poor is the degree to which an agent(s) has the capacity to undertake certain types of actions. The capacity reason can be applied in two ways. The first deals with the capacity an agent has to undertake poverty-alleviating actions (economical, cognitive and physical). The second deals with the capacity-based obligations (professional) that an agent has to act in relation to poverty alleviation. For example a poor individual living in an affluent country, cannot be expected to equally discharge a duty of beneficence the same way as an affluent individual. Or the affluent individual cannot be expected to

⁶ For a similar discussion on epistemic moral obligations see Zimmerman's ignorance thesis.

discharge his duty to the same extent as an aid relief worker. Since in this paper we are primarily interested in the moral duties of individuals, it is important to simply say that the state generates specific moral obligations for specific individuals.

11. Conclusion

As I have shown throughout this section it is important to create better criteria for distributing moral obligations which can help individuals to effectively fulfil their moral obligations, but first, it is necessary to acknowledge that we have pluralist moral duties to the poor. Perhaps accepting a pluralist account for moral duties is more complex, and requires more work in order to effectively determine our moral obligations. This should not be seen as a reason to reject the account, rather as a challenge that could offer an immeasurable reward which we have failed to accomplish for so many years, namely to reduce global poverty.

This challenge is not simply a weak reason to act, or a reason to shyly invite others to follow, rather a strong statement requiring obligatory action. This challenge, could lead us to track wrongdoers, and make them accountable, therefore our harming contributions to the poor will be minimized. Only then can we provide effective humanitarian aid, as well as focusing on effective ways in which we can provide assistance to reform poor nations' policies, practices and institutions.

Section III

So far I have presented how the transhumanists envision ME its effect on poverty alleviation, and I have also presented why the moral duties and reasons individuals hold when undertaking poverty alleviation actions are plural. These are determined by various and equal considerations that allows individuals to effectively alleviate poverty.

In what follows I will argue that even if in certain situations affluent individuals only have a single moral duty/reason to alleviate poverty, then the effective way to discharge those duties is not simply by being beneficent, as the transhumanists argue in regards to ME. Rather, to acknowledge that global poverty is an issue of deeper implications, namely, of an economic, political and social nature that ought to be addressed by reason not solely altruism. Furthermore, because we have pluralist moral duties I will argue that the transhumanists are wrong and have a myopic view of global poverty, which focuses exclusively on one kind of duty (beneficence), and that reduces a complex issue to pure altruism.

12. Global Poverty and ME

So far in this paper I have presented an introduction of what transhumanism is and its proposition relating to ME. I have also presented my pluralist account of the moral duties individuals have to the poor and ways in which moral duties ought to be discharged to effectively alleviate global poverty. Finally in this section I will present in detail the ME account in direct relation to

poverty alleviation, how it is envisioned by the transhumanists and how it will emerge in relation to pluralist moral duties accounts.

For this discussion it is not important to define the specifics of how such enhancement interventions could occur or if they are technologically plausible. We merely need to show that if it happens in the form envisioned by some transhumanists, then it would be counterproductive, and morally undesirable. That is not to say individuals ought not be morally enhanced. Many common activities in our society could be characterized as morally enhancing, such as moral education. The point is that morally enhanced individuals in the spirit of Savulescu, Douglas and Persson is what I will contend to be morally undesirable.

13. ME according to Savulescu and Persson

Savulescu and Persson argue in their paper "Moral Trashumanism" (2010) that it is imperative to morally enhance individuals in order to solve the most urgent issues (global poverty) in today's society, and that failing to do so, would be a harming contribution (negative duty violation). They also argue that the widely held act-omission doctrine (which stipulates that harming is more morally reprehensible than failing to assist) has continued to promote global poverty, by allowing individuals in the affluent world to justify not providing aid, hence failing to be altruistic.

One factor behind the weakness of the inclination to aid is the hold that the act-omission doctrine has on our minds. An-other factor is just as

probably our limited altruism. But there is a further factor worth mentioning: the sheer number of subjects to whom we have to respond can present an obstacle to a proper response. While many of us are capable of vividly imagining the suffering of a single subject before our eyes and, consequently, feel strong compassion, we are unable vividly to imagine the suffering of hundreds, let alone thousands of subjects even if they are in sight. Nor could we feel a compassion that is 100 times (or more) as strong as the compassion we feel for a single sufferer. Rather, the degree of our felt compassion is likely to remain more or less constant when we switch from reflecting upon the suffering of a single subject to the suffering of hundreds of subjects. (Savulescu and Persson 2010: 9)

What is problematic about their argument which attributes global poverty to the act-omission doctrine, is that it misleads individuals and it's also false. As previously discussed the problem regarding global poverty is not as simple as they see it, and it is not only about people being willing to assist or having a limited altruism. The problem lies in the way we assign moral obligations without focusing on considerations of causality, intent, capacity to effect change and epistemic obligations. In other words it is not simply an argument about positive duties being more stringent than negative or vice versa. Rather, that in order to effectively address global poverty we ought to acknowledge that our moral obligations vary depending on our individual actions. The fact that we widely accept only one reason to avoid global poverty, even when we

sometimes have no reason that clearly grounds our moral obligations, makes it more difficult for individuals to effectively alleviate poverty.

I have previously presented Singer's argument on poverty alleviation and how saving a drowning child is akin to saving the global poor. I have also, hopefully successfully, objected to his argument. Savulescu and Persson's argument resonates with Singer's in three different ways. They both contend that 1) Positive duties are as stringent as negative; therefore reject the act-omission doctrine 2) Individuals ought to be more moral in order to address global poverty, and 3) Failing to assist will contribute to the impoverishment and perhaps the death of poor individuals. I can then say that at least at first sight, Savulescu and Persson's argument appears to be invalid.

In order to fully understand Savulescu and Persson's approach and the effect it can have on poverty alleviation I will first present an argument on our moral obligations to the poor, and those we might have contributed to harm. This will be made in the same spirit as Wisor (2011). Second, I will present an argument based on the agent's morally desirable capacities such as critical thinking/reasoning that allows for the understanding of the complexities of social structures and interactions with others.

First let us explain shallow pond thinking. According to Wisor it means that certain issues, –in his example global poverty– cannot be addressed utilizing a process by which critical thinking is not exercised. That is, shallow pond thinking boils down an issue to the point where most of its essential

components are lost, which could bring more harm than good. A few of the reasons why we ought not address issues in this manner is because it fails to recognize essential components that allow us to effectively assess any given situation and rectify any wrongdoing. For instance, according to Singer, individuals donating money can solve global poverty. The problem of course is not that individuals engage in acts of beneficence but that they do it without asking important moral questions, such as, why are these people poor, who or what is affecting them, are we contributing to their harm via our international institutions (See Pogge), what is the best way to help in relation to the needs of the poor etc.

Savulescu and Persson's approach to address global poverty via ME has some merit, in that they see global poverty as an issue that individuals ought to prioritize. They are envisioning a global change in which enhanced individuals would be more inclined to assist others, and extend their altruism. Although it is morally important to address global poverty, it is not clear that the means, by which they set out to do so, is equally acceptable. For instance they argue that what we have been lacking as individuals is the will to act to solve global poverty "it is the moral will to use them to the full that has been lacking in the affluent nations" (Savulescu 2010: 11). The fact that they assert that global poverty is simply a question of will in the affluent world and that altruism and beneficence is all that is needed to solve issues as complex as global poverty, casts doubt on the credibility of ME. Similar to Singer they believe that all it takes to help the global poor are donations from affluent

individuals, when in fact what is required is not only will but also critical thinking and attention to the best means of poverty alleviation.

To better understand the effect of ‘shallow-pond-thinking’, I will make use of the following example. An individual X encounters another asking for economic donations to assist poor individuals in country Y. Since X is morally enhanced he feels more empathetic, therefore he is inclined to spare some coins to help individuals in country Y. The action of individual X being beneficent appears to be desirable, but it is often self-defeating. According to Savulescu and Persson’s argument, they would be satisfied that the poor individuals’ need for assistance brought about X’s beneficent reaction, in this case to donate money. The problem with that scenario is that something important was left out, namely a lack of attention to the best means of poverty alleviation. Perhaps Y is impoverished because a dictator is exploiting the natural resources of the country and foreign aid might even be fuelling that regime. Or as Pogge argues, poverty may have been caused by individuals in the affluent world who validated the international borrowing and resource privileges to the dictatorship in country Y (See Pogge: 2002). These are all things we ought to consider. The point to make is that when it comes to deciding on reasons to alleviate poverty we have to ask two things 1) what is grounding our plural moral-duties to the poor. Once we have identified our moral obligations we have to ask 2) what are the best means of poverty alleviation.

The previous example I presented grants that if affluent individuals have in fact causally worsened the conditions of the global poor, then we have a moral obligation of reparation. The problem is most of our harming contributions to the poor (as in the previous case) are perpetrated by actions of the state (institutions) not average individuals, therefore how does ME intend to accomplish effective poverty relief? To make this point even clearer let us assume that moral enhancement has been developed successfully and individuals are encouraged to undertake the enhancement procedure. Let us further assume that the majority of individuals that go through the process are average citizens. Arguably these enhanced individuals would have better dispositions to act justly and with empathy. Let us further say that individuals working for the harming institutions opt out of moral enhancement. If that is the case, then institutions will not change through ME, hence poverty will not be effectively alleviated. Even if we insist that the individuals working for the harming institutions can also be morally enhanced, we cannot reasonably expect individuals working for the harming institutions to go through a moral enhancement procedure, since we have to recognize that international institutions (not aid relief) have motives and agendas that do not pertain to altruistic reasons, nor the protection of human rights in developing countries (See Miller: 2010). In other words we can reasonably grant that i) poverty alleviation in some instances requires political action, or reform from affluent nations ii) in other circumstances affluent individuals harm the poor via institutions, and that iii) wealthy individuals not only inadvertently harm the poor but sometimes they do so, to benefit economically (See Pogge). Therefore because ME purports to alleviate poverty with altruism, but poverty

alleviation sometimes requires economic and political reform/action from affluent nations, and affluent nations sometimes benefit from those injustices, we can safely say that it is unlikely for institutions to change through ME, or that ME can successfully alleviate poverty.

One objection to this argument could be that if all average individuals were morally enhanced they could put pressure on states and institutions or individuals in power to perhaps become morally enhanced to address global poverty. This could mean a long-term solution to global poverty, which, as I have mentioned, is unlikely although even if they did this, it would not mean the global outcome would be morally desirable. As I have previously said, the issues around global poverty do not pertain only to the willingness of individuals to assist, even if the only duties we might have to the poor are positive. Rather, poverty alleviation is complex and moral obligations are pluralist. In the next section of this essay I will further explain how simple willingness to exercise beneficence can in fact be an immoral action because it fails to recognize our moral duties in a global world.

So far I have argued that Savulescu and Persson's approach to make individuals more moral will in fact have unintended consequences because 1) it is a moral mistake to equally assign moral obligations to individuals without acknowledging other important considerations that help determine moral duties and the degree of responsibility, and 2) because arriving to a – shallow pond thinking– conclusion would lead to undesired moral consequences. Finally I have argued that it is a mistake to assume that moral

enhancement is a necessary condition to effectively address global poverty. The second objection that I will present towards ME is based on Douglas' argument of discounting counter-moral emotions for the purpose of poverty alleviation. Due to the main focus of this essay, which is the effect ME could have on poverty alleviation, I am not going to argue specifically about the moral significance of emotions (See Oakley: 1992) and the consequences of discounting "undesired" ones. Some have argued these undesired emotions are neither intrinsically good nor instrumental; rather they are unique for furthering human development (See Jonas: 2010). Although these arguments are important for moral and mood enhancements, I will leave them for a different discussion.

14. ME according to Douglas

I have previously discussed in section I (pg. 6) the way Douglas envisions ME, and how his argument of discounting counter-moral emotions can be extended to promoting pro-social behaviours. These could lead to individuals having better motives, and therefore to poverty reduction. "There is clearly scope for most people to morally enhance themselves. According to every plausible theory, people often have bad or suboptimally good motives. And according to many plausible theories, some of the world's most important problems- such as developing world poverty...-can be attributed to these deficits." (Douglas 2008: 230)

Before engaging with Douglas' account and its effect on global poverty, it is important to first mention that in order to recognize that our individual

actions can attract specific moral obligations, and that the moral duties we have towards others are not exclusive to individuals with which we share a spatiotemporal setting, we need, as individuals, the capacity to reason and think critically; that is to be fully functioning moral agents. Having said that, I will present a case based on Douglas' account that will allow us to fully understand the implications of ME and poverty alleviation.

A morally enhanced individual happens to come across a shop (we will call him "consumer"), which is struggling to stay open. He knows the owner ("vendor"), who is hardworking but his business is about to go bankrupt. Consumer also knows that vendor employs a number of people and that it would be undesirable for the shop to close. Because consumer is morally enhanced and feels very empathetic he decides to buy something from the shop. Before purchasing the product he realizes that the brands vendor sells are manufactured with materials from a country ruled by dictatorship that has been found to use the profit from the sales of natural resources to maintain and abuse its power via violence, enriching only those in power, and hence impoverishing the population. Consumer's likely actions would be:

- 1) Consumer could help vendor and do nothing about the population in source country, hence harming the population.
- 2) Consumer could help the population, and not help vendor.
- 3) Consumer could help vendor and population or
- 4) Consumer could not help vendor or population.

In this case we can clearly identify that consumer has no direct connection to the state of vendor or the population in source country (assuming consumer does not have a special state duty that promotes or aids the dictatorship in such country). Vendor is struggling perhaps because of bad luck or the economic situation, and the population because they are being taken advantage of by an immoral dictator. In this case consumer shares a positive duty towards both parties (again assuming that the state of the population is in no way related to the actions of the consumer). Here a dilemma arises; realistically consumer cannot help vendor and population at the same time. In the immediate situation consumer is presented, he can either help one or the other. That is, in order to help the population he must refrain from buying a product from vendor, if he helps vendor he is harming the population. Further, since there is a moral distinction between a positive and a negative duty and morally speaking a violation of a negative duty is more stringent than a duty to assist when the negative duty has a greater moral risk, then consumer ought to help the population by not buying a product from vendor, because if consumer buys from vendor, he is violating a negative duty, namely further harming the state of the population.

Douglas' view on moral enhancement would most likely be focused on action 1), since a moral disposition is placed on the individual it would seem implausible to think that consumer would in fact discount his emotions of empathy towards vendor. Most likely consumer would emotionally react based on his enhanced moral dispositions and fail to engage with the difficult moral questions, therefore harming the population. It is possible that the

nature of the moral enhancement could give equal disposition (empathy) to everyone. If that were the case consumer would most likely opt for action 3, which is implausible. That is consumer would have to buy a product from vendor, and also perhaps provide aid to the population via other means. This conclusion is rather strange; on one hand the individual is violating a negative duty by harming the population and on the other consumer is discharging a positive duty by helping the population. In moral terms if consumer has contributed to harm, then consumer's further action to balance his wrongdoing would in fact have to be an act of compensation not of beneficence, hence more stringent. It seems that Douglas' vision of moral enhancement would fail not only to recognize other individuals outside their shared spatiotemporal setting as in the previous case (the population) but also to properly enable the individual to discharge and assess their respective moral obligations.

There is also an unsettling element of partially losing one's autonomy in Savulescu, Persson and Douglas' argument. The way they envision ME, and its effect on humans, renders ME counterproductive, and also limits to some extent human autonomy. Non-enhanced individuals use their reason to assess and balance any given situation; they also weigh and consider different factors in order to determine their moral obligations, and with their capacity to reason they are attentive to the best means of poverty alleviation. It then seems that the ME that the transhumanists are envisioning in fact is taking away some of the elements that make humans fully functioning moral agents. Perhaps their argument is worrisome partly because it uniquely focuses on

solely discharging positive duties. This is problematic only insofar as the duties individuals ought to discharge coincide with positive duties, if not, enhanced individuals will be left with the burden of discharging moral obligations that do not belong to them. More importantly the real issues will not be solved since those issues can only be addressed by non-altruistic actions.

The final problem with their argument is that even if individuals only share a positive duty to the poor, the means in which these individuals will discharge those duties is still problematic. The fact that they think addressing global poverty is only an issue pertaining to individuals' will and emotions is troublesome and reflects ignorance towards the complex causes of global poverty. Their misguided notion of global poverty could in fact bring even more harm to the poor, and even render morally enhanced individuals unable to be fully function moral agents.

15. Conclusion

In this essay I have argued against the trashumanists' position on moral enhancement, specifically against their claim that global issues such as poverty would be eradicated through ME. Their arguments fail to effectively account for all moral obligations and could potentially lead to harmful outcomes. I have also argued that the trashumanists fail to acknowledge the distinct relationships individuals have in a global world and instead of making individuals more moral it would restrain individuals from properly discharging their respective moral obligations, hence affecting their

autonomy. The argument that I have presented in this paper is not to say that transhumanism and specifically ME is morally undesirable, simply that the ME that Savulescu, Persson and Douglas are envisioning for alleviating global poverty is unsound and needs revision.

It seems that in order for individuals to be more moral and better in addressing global poverty we ought to first recognize that our moral duties and obligations are not of one kind. They vary depending on our actions and on specific considerations of causality, capacity to effect change, intention and epistemic obligations. Once we acknowledge that we have pluralist moral duties to alleviate global poverty, we would be better equipped to distribute moral obligations to the right actors, and then to effectively fulfil them, which is equally important. In order to accomplish this we require something from individuals, similar to what Harris argues, namely to exercise our capacity to reason and think critically in order to be attentive to the best means of poverty alleviation. Perhaps at this point in time the alleged benefits of ME do not require any genetic intervention or human enhancement, and it is not as elusive as the transhumanists envision. Rather, it is the capacity to reason, and the will to effectively reduce poverty by acknowledging our pluralist moral duties to the poor, which we simply ought to exercise. New technologies such as human enhancement often offer simple solutions to complex issues, but before we embark on a journey of no return, we ought to first carefully ponder the difficult and complex moral implications. "The message that emerges is perhaps not novel: proceed, but with caution. The gaining of

genetic knowledge proceeds apace. We must be careful to ensure that it is accompanied by the gaining of genetic wisdom (Gray 1996: 8).

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