

Unit 4: Human Enhancement and Transhumanism

Are We Changing the Human Being and Should We Change Our Being?

Lesson 3: Revelatory Insight into Enhancing Our Beings and Human Features

Time Length: 45-50 min.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS):

Science and Engineering Practices:

- Asking Questions and Defining Problems: Students explore the ethical and philosophical questions raised by human enhancement technologies.
- Engaging in Argument from Evidence: Debating the merits and drawbacks of transhumanism based on religious, ethical, and scientific evidence.

Crosscutting Concepts:

- Cause and Effect: Understanding how advancements in technology can have profound effects on society and human identity.
- Systems and System Models: Analyzing the human body and society as systems that are impacted by technological advancements.

LS4: Biological Evolution: Examining the concept of human evolution in the context of transhumanism and contrasting it with religious views.

ETS1: Engineering Design: Considering the implications of designing technologies that alter human capabilities and the ethical boundaries involved.

Common Core Standards:

English Language Arts Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.1: Citing specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts, attending to important distinctions the author makes and to any gaps or inconsistencies in the account.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Engaging effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on complex topics, texts, and issues.

History/Social Studies Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7: Integrating and evaluating multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9: Comparing and contrasting treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Content Learning Outcomes:

- Identify key components of transhumanist ideology
- Distinguish between Islamic theological perspectives on human enhancement and its purposes and secular bio-scientific views

- Apply scriptural and scientific concepts to evaluate the uses of biomedical technologies to 'change' the human body

Materials:

- **Presentation Slides** (Slides 29-39)
- **Triple-Entry Vocabulary Journal** (Student Responsibility)
- Video Clips for Activity:
 - Mandalorian - "Fennec's Cybernetic Implants" - Book of Boba Fett S01E04 Clip - 4k
 - Avatar (the first one) - Scene From Avatar Number 2.
 - Avatar (to be shown in connection with pervious scene) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0GowLIIHck>

Instruction/Teacher Facilitation:

- ❖ In this unit, so far, we have discussed the concept of transhumanism and further discussed the elements of treatment/therapy versus enhancement, which are all aspects of changing the human body. We looked at the elements of transhumanism earlier, and now we will look at the ideology behind transhumanism. There are some fundamental ideas behind transhumanism of what a human being actually is, and what the purpose of a human is. These ideas define the way that transhumanism takes shape and what these scientists believe can and can not be done. Today's goal is to identify those ideas backing transhumanism and see if, and how, these ideas correlate with Islamic principles.

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- ❖ How Do You Think This Verse Relates to Transhumanism?
 - فَوَسَّسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوَاتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَينَ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ
 - "Then Satan whispered to them that he might manifest unto them that which was hidden from them of their shame, and he said: Your Lord forbade you from this tree only lest you should become angels or become of the immortals." (Surah Al-A'raaf 7:20)
 - Transhumanism is working towards a post-human that can live forever, or at least get us to live as long as possible.
 - The intro video about transhumanism from the previous lesson mentioned that the goal of transhumanism is to improve humans so that we become "fitter" - in the context of humans being a product of evolution.
 - The ideology of transhumanism is in the context of a specific view of the human, and the purpose of a human being's life, as well as an outlook at the future of humans.
 - This is seen in movies and books that have transhumanistic assertions in their stories.
 - In this verse, Shaitan tells Adam (A), to do this and you'll live forever.
 - This is a fear, hesitance, or even hatred that humans have for death, and, therefore, humans want to live longer or even forever.
 - BUT, death is something that, we *know* as Muslims, Allah (swt) has already written for us. It is an imminent occurrence.

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- ❖ Looking at the Journey of our Souls (as we looked at in previous Units):
 - We know that our soul goes through various stages (4 general stages)
 1. **Life of Souls** - We were souls without bodies.
 2. **This Life** - Our souls were breathed into our bodies.
 3. **In the Grave** - Our souls will separate from our bodies and our bodies will decay, as our soul moves on.
Revelatory Evidence: "Every soul shall taste/experience death." (Surah Ali-Imraan:185) - here it says that every soul shall "experience" death.
 4. **The Afterlife** - Our souls will be reunited with our resurrected bodies.
 - This framework gives us a framework of human existence, and therefore also puts into perspective the transhumanistic ideas of self-improvement and enhancement.
 - The purpose of a human being comes from an understanding of who we are as humans.
 - Who we are as humans:
 - Not products of an evolutionary process - we are souls that began by Allah's (swt) command and came into existence.
 - We were put into a body, on this earth, for a temporary time.
 - We will indeed die
 - We will then later be resurrected

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- ❖ So these two views of on humans, the transhumanistic view and the Islamic view, bring up certain pertinent questions: [Have students discuss these questions and come up with their answers and reasoning for each of their answers.]
 - 1. What does it mean to make humans better? - the answer to this question will be different based on what you think the *purpose* of a human being is.
 - IF you think that a human being's purpose is to maximize personal pleasure and try to live forever, then you will have a particular sight/idea of how to make human beings better.
 - IF you think that human beings are a body and a soul, and that death is a looming reality; and the purpose of this life is to maximize what we do in this life for the sake of or in preparation of another life, then you will have a different sight/idea of how to make human beings better.
 - Then also, the use of transhumanism or its goal is changed as well.
 - Perhaps it is focused on trying to make the spiritual experience better or making some changes that make obedience to ALLAH's commands easier etc.
 - 2. Will we be able to make humans better?
 - IF a human being is just a material body, then the functioning of the human body becomes the most important aspect of the human, and the focus will be to make it functionally better. (Making the body stronger, impervious to disease etc).
 - BUT this view ignores/missing a whole part of the human being which is the consciousness, the soul, and spiritual states.

- IF a human being is defined by the body AND a soul, then the focus of improvement will be metaphysical in nature, as well as physical.
- 3. Will humans be able to live forever?
 - Again, this goes back to the fundamental belief of how a human being is defined.
 - From an Islamic perspective, this is an easy question, but how exactly is that “forever” life or what does that look like will play a part in how a person enhances themselves.

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- ❖ Let’s look at some ayaat of the Quran that would help us answer these questions:
 - On the idea of changing Allah (swt)’s creation - Allah (swt) says in the Quran: “... they pray to none else than Satan, a rebel whom Allah cursed, and he said: Surely I will take of Your servants an appointed portion, and surely I will lead them astray, and surely I will arouse desires in them, and surely I will command them and they will cut the ears of cattle, and surely I will command them and they will change Allah’s creation. Whoever chooses Satan for a patron instead of Allah is verily a loser and his loss is manifest.” (Surah An-Nisaa 4:117-9)
 - Human beings are one of the creations of Allah (swt). So changing human beings would also be an element of what is being mentioned here.
 - This differs from transhumanistic thought because, remember, they believe that humans are part of an evolutionary process, not a formed creation of Allah (swt).
 - Shaitan is saying that he will command human beings to change the creation of Allah (swt) (part of this is changing other human beings).
 - Context of this verse is referring to the pagans, polytheists of Makkah, who used to do consecrate/make sacred certain animals, and then to show this, they would do things like slit the ears of these animals and do other things that would qualify as “changing the creation of ALLAH”.
 - Various ahadith also testify and apply this concept to human beings changing themselves.
 - Because this “changing” is a command or influenced by Shaitan, the fuqaha have stated its impermissibility (again, along with proofs from these ahadith).
 - A highly oversimplified summary of this concept, not to get into the details of what is permissible or impermissible, but for us to exercise that Higher-Level thinking, is:
 - It is unlawful to beautify a human being by effecting *significant, permanent* change, *but* medical treatment is permissible.
 - Ex: cutting your hair to look nice is not considered a significant change, nor a permanent change because your hair grows back.
 - Ex: purposefully breaking your legs to enhance the human being and making them more beautiful, in this case to make yourself taller, would be considered a significant, permanent change; and this would be considered impermissible.



- Nevertheless, medical treatment is permissible. So if someone broke their leg, because of some accident, and surgery was needed to repair that leg; this would be permissible.
- Ex: cosmetic surgery for mere beautification would be impermissible, yet cosmetic surgery due to disfigurement of the face would be permissible because it would be considered medical treatment.
- This is not a straightforward rule, there are a lot of complexities here that are considered, so this rule is a generalization and an overarching principle, but exceptions to this can be made based on circumstances.
- There are complexities in trying to figure out what treatment is, what a disease is, when it is therapy, and when it is enhancement. These are all questions that the fuqahaa discuss with doctors in order to come to conclusions about each individual case.
- But from a higher level, overall perspective, we want to have this viewpoint that this is how Allah (swt) has created us as human beings, and it is impermissible to “change” ourselves in a way that is significant and permanent, with the exception of medical treatment.

{SLIDE 33} - Relate this concept back to the 3 cases seen in Lesson 2- Tommy John Surgery, LASIK eye surgery, and NuClarity use. Ask students: Would you change your view now of what you thought about these surgeries before?

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- So we have established that Allah (swt) has created us, and now we see that HE has created us in the best of form.
 - Allah (swt) says: **لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ** ... Surely We created man in the best form.” (Surah At-Tin 95:4)
 - Concept that Allah (swt) has created us in the best way for our optimal or proper function.
 - Ex: the purpose of the ear is to hear, the purpose of the eye is to see, so the anatomy follows the physiology of the body part.
 - But what about the entire/whole/complete human being? What is the purpose of a human being itself? The purpose of the human being is to know Allah (swt), to worship HIM, and to Love HIM.
 - So the “best” form of the human being is not the strongest, fastest, insusceptible to disease, lives forever, etc. It is the form that best fulfills this purpose of knowing and worshiping Allah (swt). And this is in reference to not just the bodily form, but the best spiritual form as well (the fitra = the form of the soul). The spiritual form can change when we purify it (be grateful and humble etc), and can be distorted when we allow exposure to sin (shirk, lying, showing off, etc.)
 - Therefore, Humans have been created with the best *potential* to freely choose to worship Allah (swt) (but that potential is not always realized).



- **وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الْإِنْسَانَ إِلَّا ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ** “But We will reduce them to the lowest of the low” (Surah At-Tin 95:5) is what happens when this potential of our human existence is not fulfilled or realized.
- This also aligns with the concept in Islam, that all the shariah rules we have are for our benefit; that Allah (swt) wants us to benefit and therefore these things are put in place to benefit us. Consequently, doing these things, that we are being told to refrain from, will cause us harm. So, changing the human being in a significant and permanent way is forbidden, and will harm us.

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- No Immortality in **this** Life.
 - **كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ** “Every soul will, without doubt, fully experience death.” (Surah Al-Ambiyaa 21:35)
 - It is part of our Imaan to believe in death; death is a reality of life. Every single human being will die. And death is defined as the removal or separation of the soul from the body; a transfer of our soul from one realm of existence into another realm of existence.
 - Death gives our lives purpose; it makes our lives meaningful. There is a time limit to life (so a sense of urgency and motivation) and consequences for our actions in the hereafter (accountability and compensation for how we spend our lives).
 - ◆ If a person lives a life of pain and suffering, and they are patient and believes in a life after death, in which they will be rewarded for their suffering and patience, then this life and the difficulties that they are experiencing become eternal bliss in the next life; therefore this suffering becomes meaningful and purposeful.
 - ◆ If a person dies and that's it, there is no afterlife, and they suffer calamities in life, then human existence becomes depressing and lacks purpose. Why would anyone want to continue to live (if they have to go through difficulty for no reason, no purpose)?

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- But there is immortality in the **next** life.
 - The belief in something coming after death gives life purpose. And not just life, but an eternal life, an immortal life.
 - **وَجَزَاءُكُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ** “Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of Eden underneath which rivers flow, wherein they dwell **forever**. Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him.” (Surah Al-Bayyinah 98:8)
 - Immortality is in the next life, not here. If we ignore this and expand life here on earth, there is only so far that we can go.

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- ❖ Culminating Group Activity:
 - Divide the students into groups and assign a video clip to them.

- Instructions:
 - Identify transhumanist elements in the following video clips
 - Rewrite the stories to make them more Islamic/ align with Islamic theology (rewrite any un-Islamic notions to make them follow the guidelines presented). (Give the students about 10 minutes to do the rewrites.)
- Have each group present their identification of the transhumanist elements and their Islamic rewrites.
- The class will vote on the best stories after all the groups have shared their rewritten stories.
- Video Clips:
 - Mandalorian - 2 moral agents here, the patient and the doctor
 - Avatar (the first one) - Jake Sully, the main character, is about to enter the pod [Scene From Avatar Number 2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0GowLIHck).
And now he has been uploaded into his new body:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0GowLIHck>

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- Transhumanist elements present in each clip (a guide for teachers - these are the transhumanist elements that students can point out) -
 - Mandalorian - Note Boba uses the word 'modification' which is a neutral term related to enhancement. Then he says 'This woman is dying' and he brings her to the shop to regain life [the idea of immortality in transhumanism]. The 'doctor' has cybernetic implants so he can perform body modifications better. The idea of doctors being technicians and serving the customer (seen by him seeing the money bag and saying 'You should have said that first').
 - Avatar - Note the language when the protagonist who can't use his legs says something to the effect 'I have lived my life not dealing with what doctors say I can't do' which again represents moving beyond medicine. The entire video clip demonstrates mind uploading. Note the language that the technician uses, such as that is a 'gorgeous brain' speaking of the protagonist's brain as it is 'phasing' with the Avatar. Then it moves beyond the brain substrate as the mind is uploading to a new body and the staff says 'Welcome to your new body.'
- Islamic Rewrites (a guide for teachers as to what Islamic elements to incorporate into the rewritten versions of these video clips -
 - Examine the intentions with which the actions are being done; include intent for the akhirah.
 - Add virtue to actions so that it is not just a physical action but one that transcends the physical and has metaphysical elements, i.e. reward for good deeds and sin for forbidden actions, virtue in struggling and overcoming the difficulty, perseverance and patience.

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- ❖ Deeper Reflection and Changing the Underlying Narrative
 - In the past, storylines usually included someone who struggled something in life (growing up as an orphan, having an ill family member that needed specialized care and the effect of that to the people around him/her or close family member dies of an incurable disease) and how they overcame that difficulty and became incredibly good/moral people. The audience is, in turn, moved by this human experience.
 - In all of these storylines, we see an underlying theme, that whenever something bad/harmful happens to a human being, they don't have to worry, they can just get some modifications made to their body (turned into a robot, or mechanical body parts etc), so that they can be fixed up in a way that will make them live forever. This is transhumanist ideology at its core. Where is the struggle? Where is the human experience of overcoming difficulties? When this transhumanist ideology is put into people's minds, then when real difficulty comes that cannot be "fixed" in real life, they don't know how to deal with that, grow with that, and become a better person as a result of that.
 - So, this underlying aspect, a deeper narrative of acceptance, gratitude and doing something great with what a person is given would have made these clips more Islamic. There should be a reflection of what is the purpose of our human existence, what a human being actually is, and portraying our Islamic values which needs to be brought into the recasting/analysis of these clips.