

# ABSTRACTS

## DAY 1

### **We Have Always Been Cyborgs**

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner  
(John Cabot University, Rome)

In *We Have Always Been Cyborgs*, I stressed (2022, 128) the following: “Truthfulness, mindfulness, and impulse control take the radical diversity of concepts of the good seriously and can be applied to a great diversity of different lifestyles.” These three virtues are not only relevant for promoting the likelihood of living a good life based on the understanding of a radical plurality of goodness, but they also increase the likelihood of moral behavior.

### **More than Human: Ubuntu and Genetic Engineering**

Rianna Oelofsen  
(Department of Philosophy, University of Fort Hare, South Africa)

In this paper, I will argue that if it were possible to genetically engineer people to have more moral traits such as kindness and empathy, such engineering would not only be permissible but highly desirable according to the Afro-communitarian worldview. I will first give an exposition of the Afro-communitarian position that I will use as my theoretical framework, namely ubuntu. I will then show how, from such a framework, it is desirable to genetically engineer people to be the morally best persons they can be, if and when it is possible to do so.

### **Can Morally Enhanced Individuals Attain Personhood within the African Philosophical Context?**

Ademola K. Fayemi,  
(Queensland Bioethics Centre, Australian Catholic University, Brisbane)

Suppose transhumanism is accepted as incompatible with an Afro-communitarian conception of personhood, such as the Ifeanyi Menkiti’s account. If moral enhancement, roughly understood as the use of bio-medical interventions that can enhance the morally relevant behaviours of individuals in being more moral than they would have been without neuroscientific, or pharmacological interventions, is a form of transhumanism, then it is incompatible with an Afro-communitarian account of personhood. If it is incompatible (possible but incoherent) for morally enhanced individuals to attain personhood within the Menkiti’s account, then it is morally impermissible to allow moral enhancement within such African *weltanschauung*. Argument of

this type involving a transposition from incompatibility of an Afro-communitarian view of personhood with transhumanism to moral impermissibility of transhumanism is made by Amara Chimakonam, a critique of transhumanism in Africa. In this talk, I aim to contribute to the debate on moral transhumanism and personhood in African philosophical debate. Though there is complexity of interpretations of personhood in African philosophy, I focus on Menkiti's account. Drawing insights and inferences from Amara's writings on the subject of transhumanism in Africa, I aim to argue that moral enhancement is compatible with Menkiti's conception of personhood; however, such does not necessarily translate to its moral permissibility. To the extent that the debate on moral enhancement technologies as a scientific fiction or fact is still ongoing, and to establish my claims, I shall use the specific example of oxytocin as a pharmacological moral enhancement intervention for stimulating hormones relating to trust and cooperation. I defend that: (1) morally enhanced individuals, who exhibit ethical virtues that contribute positively to the community, have some potentials of attaining marginal (and not radically full) personhood within Menkiti's conception of it. Beyond individual moral excellence that they may possess, there are other performative requirements of attributing personhood, including ancestry, ritual participation and social roles fulfilment that are not necessarily by-products of personal virtues attributable to a morally enhanced agent. (2) Some of the morally relevant behaviours of individuals (such as psychopaths) that can be prioritised to benefit from such interventions like oxytocin may lead to the attainment of partial personhood but not necessarily morally justified behaviours. (3) To the extent that a case for moral enhancement can cohere with the ontological and normative structures of personhood in Menkiti's analysis, there are moral tensions arising from such compatibility, which can perpetuate harm if unresolved. (4) An Afrofuturist conception of personhood can help in addressing some of the moral tensions and conflicting moral intuitions resulting from a constriction of moral enhancement within Menkiti's personhood framework.

### **Should Sub-Saharan Africa be Hopeful about the Emergence of Technologized Personhood?**

Isaiah A. Negedu

(Department of Philosophy, Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria)

I decide to join my voice in the conversation of transhumanism in Africa that Ademola Fayemi initiated and Amara Esther Chimakonam wrote a reply. Partly, it is my intention to establish middle ground in the discourse. However, in doing that, I am not quite sure I am willing to swing to any side of the divide because, based on some facts at my disposal, I think that both scholars overrated the preparedness of Africa to delve into the transhumanist future. The reason for my submission is that the debate about transhumanism and its neighbouring concepts like afrofuturism, posthumanism, technologised personhood and so on, would become more useful if and when we agree on the level of industrial revolution Africa has entered into. What my paper wants to resolve is the gap that both scholars took for granted in looking at the transhumanist future from an Afro-realistic perspective, which should necessarily lead us to question whether we have a legitimate claim to the conversation on personhood in a technologised fashion.

## DAY 2

### **Transhumanism, Singularity and Afrofuturism**

Ojochogwu S. Abdul

(Department of Philosophy, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Nigeria)

Transhumanism, a worldview and philosophy of life promoting the possibility and desirability of using science and technology in overcoming fundamental human limitations, improving the human condition, and pursuing of the eventual goal of human enhancement, has been on the rise and spreading across the globe in recent decades, albeit encountering diversity of responses ranging from excitement and acceptance to scepticism, misconceptions and opposition. Related to transhumanism is the concept of the Singularity described as a future period during which the pace and impact of technological change will be so rapid and deep that human life will be transformed irreversibly. A burgeoning conversation in African philosophy presents attempts by thinkers to subject both movements to considerations from an African lens; consisting in some cases of deliberating the place of Africa within the forthcoming global technological change events, and in other cases raising questions concerning the compatibility or otherwise of transhumanism/singularity with African worldviews, cultures and values. In arguing for the possibility of compatibility, Afrofuturism emerges as one uniquely creative perspective that opens spaces for possible connections, contextualization and exchange. As an emerging inspiration for advancement in African civilization in the 21st century and beyond, Afrofuturism is a philosophy that explores the developing intersection of African and African Diaspora culture with technology, re-imagines the past, science and the future from a black and African perspective, and blends mythology, history, science fiction and creative thinking in building narratives that positively envision what peoples of African origin can be. In this discussion, efforts shall be made to provide an exposition of transhumanism, addressing some misconceptions and anxieties about the movement, tracing some of its similar themes with the singularity, and most significantly, to explore how through the creative storytelling, dynamism and progressivism of Afrofuturism the new ideas of transhumanism and singularity could be brought into mutually enriching engagements with African(ist) visions of society and the human future.

### **Transhumanism and the African Philosophy of Ubuntu: An Ethical Convergence**

Aura Elena Schussler

(Department of Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, 1 Mihail Kogalniceanu Street, 400084, Romania)

In broad terms, the concept of individualism, which is closely associated with the idea of the self, underpins Western philosophy and ethics, including transhumanism. On the other hand, the African philosophy of Ubuntu, an ethical theory based on the principles of interconnectedness, interdependence and communalism, advocates for a decentralized understanding of personhood. These two philosophical and ethical frameworks may initially seem contradictory. However, this perspective overlooks the potential convergence between transhumanism and Ubuntu philosophy. The main objective of this study is to illustrate how Ubuntu ethics and transhumanist ethics can coexist harmoniously, promoting open dialogue and human flourishing at both individual and

communal levels within African and Western societies. These discussions highlight the need for a flexible approach to ethics that allows for a mutually-beneficial understanding of human existence in the current era, while acknowledging its continuous development and evolution. In order to achieve this, an exploration of the convergences and divergences between transhumanist thought and Ubuntu philosophy will be undertaken, with a particular focus on human enhancement and emerging technologies. This analysis will shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of both transhumanist and Ubuntu philosophy, as well as the impact of their interactions on individuals and African communities. To enrich the examination of these two philosophies—transhumanism and Ubuntu—various perspectives will be incorporated. This will include Nietzsche's communitarian viewpoint within a transhumanist framework, Stefan Sorgner's philosophy, Max More's extropian principles, and the writings of Ademola Fayemi and Cornelius Ewuoso. By integrating these viewpoints, a multi-perspective approach to the possible ethical convergence between transhumanism and Ubuntu will be fostered.

### **A Moral Evaluation of Transhumanism Alignment with Botho's Metaphysics**

Doreen Sesiro

(University of Botswana, Botswana)

In this paper, I offer a moral evaluation of transhumanism alignment to Botho's metaphysics. My overarching question is: would the scientific and technological interventions that could result in potential metaphysical changes to a person be considered morally wrong or right? From Botho's metaphysical standpoint, I answer this question both negatively and positively. In the negative, I show that biotechnological enhancements could be morally wrong when they are incompatible with some aspects of Botho's metaphysics. On the positive side, I demonstrate that some aspects of Botho's metaphysics are compatible with biotechnological interventions that aim to enhance human form or function within the human-species limit.

### **Moral Enhancement: African Philosophy, A/Humanism, and the Question of Morality**

Bruce B. Janz

(Department of Philosophy, University of Central Florida, 4000 Central Florida Blvd., Orlando)

The dream of moral enhancement arises in the context of social, cultural, and political tensions around the world. We entertain the possibility of moral enhancement precisely because human problems seem insurmountable, and the explanation for this is that individuals do not live up to their moral obligations. Historically, the answer might have been moral education, social institutions that incentivized desired action, religious systems that provided internal motivation, or laws and enforcement that penalized undesirable behavior. Now there is another option: to use technology to provide the insight, cognitive ability, memory, empathy, or will to make decisions or live in a manner that enhances morality, however that is defined.

This paper will examine one aspect of that claim: that morality can be achieved through these technological means. We will use a version of ethics that might be seen in Ubuntu philosophy, particularly that of Mogobe Ramose, to argue that any biological technology we might imagine would not enhance morality at either a cultural or an individual level. The reason is that

there is a category mistake at work here, in thinking that morality stems from the individual deliberative mind, and that enhancing some aspect of the mind would lead to greater morality (however we define this, and this in itself is a challenging problem). The category mistake becomes apparent when we consider Ramose's approach to Ubuntu, which neither subsumes the individual under the collective nor celebrates the individual as the origin and center of action. His approach includes both becoming and being as essential aspects of Ubuntu.

What this means is that morality is not just a calculation of the individual, made difficult by our various limitations and corrected by biological enhancement, nor is it simply the traditions of the collective, honed over time to preserve the group but potentially subordinating individual initiative and creativity. Morality lies between these two, and it lies in Ramose's "rheomode", which I take to be the ability to ask a new question. Such questions come both from individual creativity and collective wisdom, and allow us to see such ethical potentialities as the function of moral ambiguity, the multiplication of moral options which might satisfy many values, and the development of moral imagination, in which paths can be chosen that do not currently exist.

Moral enhancement, understood as biological enhancement, cannot target this because it does not solely exist in the individual. It cannot easily account for the moral and principled rebellion against colonialism or tyranny, for instance. One might become transhuman by enhancing for compliance, but this simply pushes the question back, and is not really about morality but is about adherence to some set of rules or standards.

While there might be an argument for moral enhancement as referring to anti-psychotic drugs, which might reorient a person's way of understanding the social world away from a delusional state, this is not what most of the literature understands moral enhancement to be. Even though Ramose does not have a chapter on ethics in his *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, he gives a picture of Ubuntu as a space of becoming that creatively draws on the past while enabling new questions to be asked. This is the space of ethics and morality, not just of law, religion, and politics. And the picture we get is one of encountering a changing world, one in which we cannot predict the outcome of actions (even those done with the best of intentions), and in which we must act (that is, we cannot refrain from acting). This is a space of collective deliberation as well as individual creativity. It is difficult to imagine any biological enhancement that would enhance that space. We are both human and ahuman, both actors and agents as well as components within larger forces, and being moral means holding both of these at the same time.

## **Transhumanism, Techno-politics and the Future of Africa**

Adeolu Oyekan

(Independent Researcher, Lagos, Nigeria)

Transhumanism, the movement that advocates enhancing human capabilities through technological interventions, holds profound implications in the age of techno-politics. As societies navigate the intricate landscape of advanced technologies, the convergence of transhumanism, power, and politics introduces a myriad of challenges and opportunities. This is because the political landscape is compelled to adapt to (and influence) transformative changes as advancements in science and engineering redefine the boundaries of what it means to be human, both at the individual and social level. As a continent characterized by diverse socio-economic challenges and varying technological capabilities, Africa stands at a crossroad where the transfer and adoption of transhumanist ideas and innovations could potentially reshape political structures

and socioeconomic dynamics. My aim in this paper is to examine the implications of transhumanism for politics in Africa, especially at a time when politics itself has become increasingly technologized. Two fundamental questions that animate this paper are: what political values are most suitable for a transhumanist Africa? What are the outcomes and implications of transhumanism for social identities and transformative politics in Africa? What are the political challenges and opportunities that embracing transhumanism in Africa holds for the continent? These questions are fundamental in driving relevant policies and positioning Africa in a transhumanist future. I argue that finding answers to the outcome question, important as it is, is secondary to finding answers to the opportunity question on transhumanism and techno-politics in Africa. Focusing on biological and cognitive enhancements as the most profound for Africa, I argue why a focus on access to technological augmentation is epistemologically and ethically more salient as an opportunity issue, than focusing on outcome question which, though important, are capable of stretching epistemic speculations. I conclude by using insights from the discussion to further situate the potential predicament of Africa in a transhuman world, within the context of inequalities between the global South and the global North, with its attendant implications for global justice.

## SHORT BIO OF SPEAKERS

1. **Stefan Lorenz Sorgner** is a philosophy professor at John Cabot University in Rome, Director and Co-Founder of the Beyond Humanism Network, Fellow at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies (IEET), Research Fellow at the Ewha Institute for the Humanities at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, academic Advisor of Humanity+, and Visiting Fellow at the Ethics Centre of the Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena. He is editor of more than 10 essay collections, and author of the following monographs: *Metaphysics without Truth* (Marquette University Press 2007), *Menschenwürde nach Nietzsche* (WBG 2010), *Transhumanismus* (Herder 2016), *Schöner neuer Mensch* (Nicolai, 2018), *Übermensch* (Schwabe 2019), *On Transhumanism* (Penn State University Press 2020), *We have always been cyborgs* (Bristol University Press 2022), *Philosophy of Posthuman Art* (Schwabe 2022), *Transhumanismus* (mit Philip von Becker, Westendverlag 2023), *Homo ex Machina* (together with Bernd Kleine-Gunk, Goldmann 2023). In addition, he is Editor-in-Chief and Founding Editor of the “*Journal of Posthuman Studies*” (a double-blind peer review journal, published by Penn State University Press since 2017). Furthermore, he is in great demand as a speaker in all parts of the world (World Humanities Forum, Global Solutions Taipei Workshop, Biennale Arte Venezia, TEDx, Colours of Ostrava) and a regular contact person for national and international journalists and media representatives (*Die Zeit*, *Cicero*, *Der Standard*; *Die Presse am Sonntag*, *Philosophy Now*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *Forbes Italia*). [www.sorgner.de](http://www.sorgner.de) & [www.mousike.de](http://www.mousike.de)

2. **Rianna Oelofsen** is an Associate Professor at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa. She has published several articles and book chapters and co-edited a book collection entitled “*An African Path to a Global Future.*” Her areas of specialization and publication include African philosophy, Education and Decolonization, Race and Gender theory, Phenomenology, and Feminism.

3. **Dr. Ademola Kazeem Fayemi** is a Senior Faculty member at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, where he teaches Philosophy. He is also a Principal Investigator at the African Cluster Centre of the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, University of Lagos. He writes and lectures widely in African philosophy, African bioethics, Research ethics, and African environmental ethics. He is currently researching the question of epistemic injustice in the Research for Health Justice Framework.

4. **Isaiah A. Negedu** is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the Federal University of Lafia. He was on a fellowship at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics in the University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. He is a member of the Conversational Society of Philosophy, Philosophers Association of Nigeria and the Nigerian Bar Association. He has published articles in academic journals and edited books. He is the guest editor of a special issue in *Filosofia Theoretica* titled, “Honorary Whiteness: Delusions of Racial Hierarchy” and co-editor of *African Democracy. Impediments, Promises and Prospects*.

5. **Ojochogwu Abdul** is a Nigerian scholar, futurist and philosophy lecturer at Kogi State University, Nigeria. In line with his pragmatic approach towards linking futurist philosophical ideas with action, Abdul engages in a series of organizational activism that include his roles as Co-founder, Enlightenment Transhumanist Forum of Nigeria; Founder, Transhumanists Africa, Inc.; Executive Advisor, Humanity+ Inc.; Advisory Board Member, Lifeboat Foundation; Co-Editor, Transhumanism and Africa Book Series; Member, Center for Transhumanist Studies; and Member, Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP). He has published widely on transhumanism and African futures and given talks on the subjects at a number of conferences.

6. **Aura Elena Schussler** is a lecturer at Babes-Bolyai University’s Department of Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy. Since 2020, she has been in charge of organizing the “Human Nature, Culture, Technology” (NUCT) series of national conferences (in Romania) at Babes-Bolyai University’s Faculty of History and Philosophy. At the same University, in 2018, she set up the student circle of Transhumanism, posthumanism, and metahumanism. Among her primary research areas are posthuman, human enhancement, sexbots, eroticism, and pornography. She wrote several articles on topics related to trans-/posthumanism, religion, and sexuality published in well-known international journals.

7. **Doreen Sesiro** is a lecturer at the University of Botswana. She teaches Philosophy and her areas of interest are Transhumanism and African Metaphysics. She holds a PhD in Philosophy (Metaphysics) from the University of Pretoria in South Africa, and an MA in Philosophy from St Augustine College of South Africa. She also holds an MA in Theology and Religious Studies, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education and a BA in Humanities from the University of Botswana. Alongside, teaching, she is a prison minister and an active board member of the Botswana Crime Research Institute, a non-governmental organization.

8. **Bruce B. Janz** is Professor in the Department of Philosophy, co-director of the Center for Humanities and Digital Research, and core faculty in the Texts and Technology Ph.D. program, all at the University of Central Florida. He works in African philosophy, concepts of place and space

across many disciplines, digital humanities, and contemporary European philosophy. He has taught in Canada, the US, Kenya, and South Africa. His latest book is *African Philosophy and Enactivist Cognition: The Space of Thought* (Bloomsbury, 2023).

9. **Adeolu Oyekan** holds a PhD from the Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, Nigeria. He has over fifteen years of teaching and research experience. He started his academic career at the Department of Philosophy, Lagos State University, in 2008, and was a 2019-2021 Postdoctoral Research Fellow on identities and social cohesion in Africa (ISCIA) at the Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa. His research interests include African philosophy, philosophy of culture, postcolonial studies, practical ethics, restorative justice, identity politics and social cohesion.