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Towards new humans? Philosophical considerations concerning human enhancement

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Atelier plateforme “Génétique et Société”

Outline

- 1. Human powers and human culture.**
- 2. A conceptual analysis of “enhancement”.**
- 3. Enhancement: what’s on the market of philosophy.**

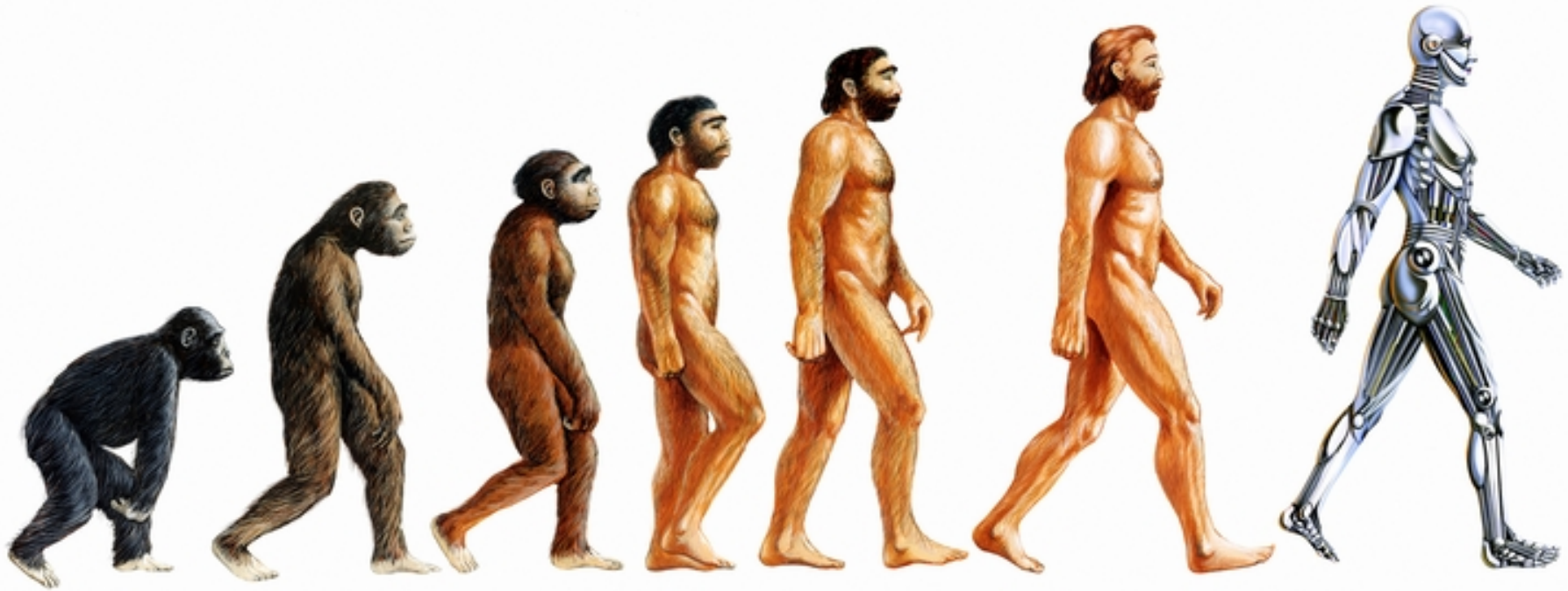
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Part 1

Human powers and human culture

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The technological enhancement of human powers



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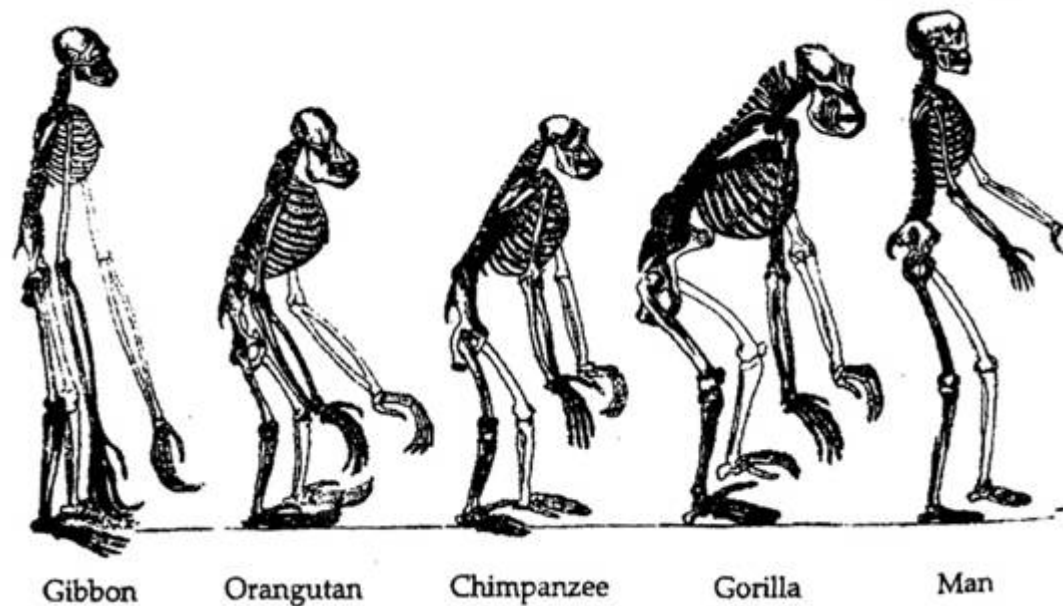
Thinking about human powers



Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564)

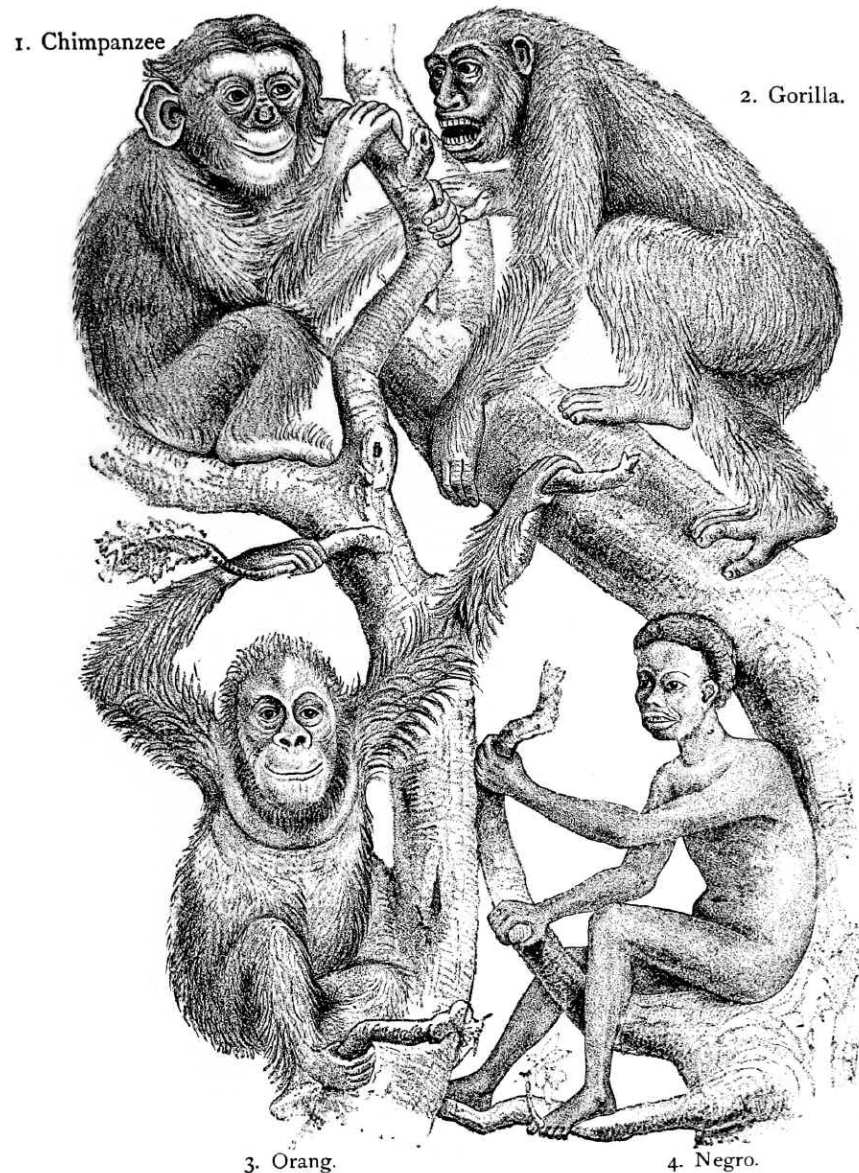
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Evolution: the cultural power of classification



Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919)

The cultural power of classification

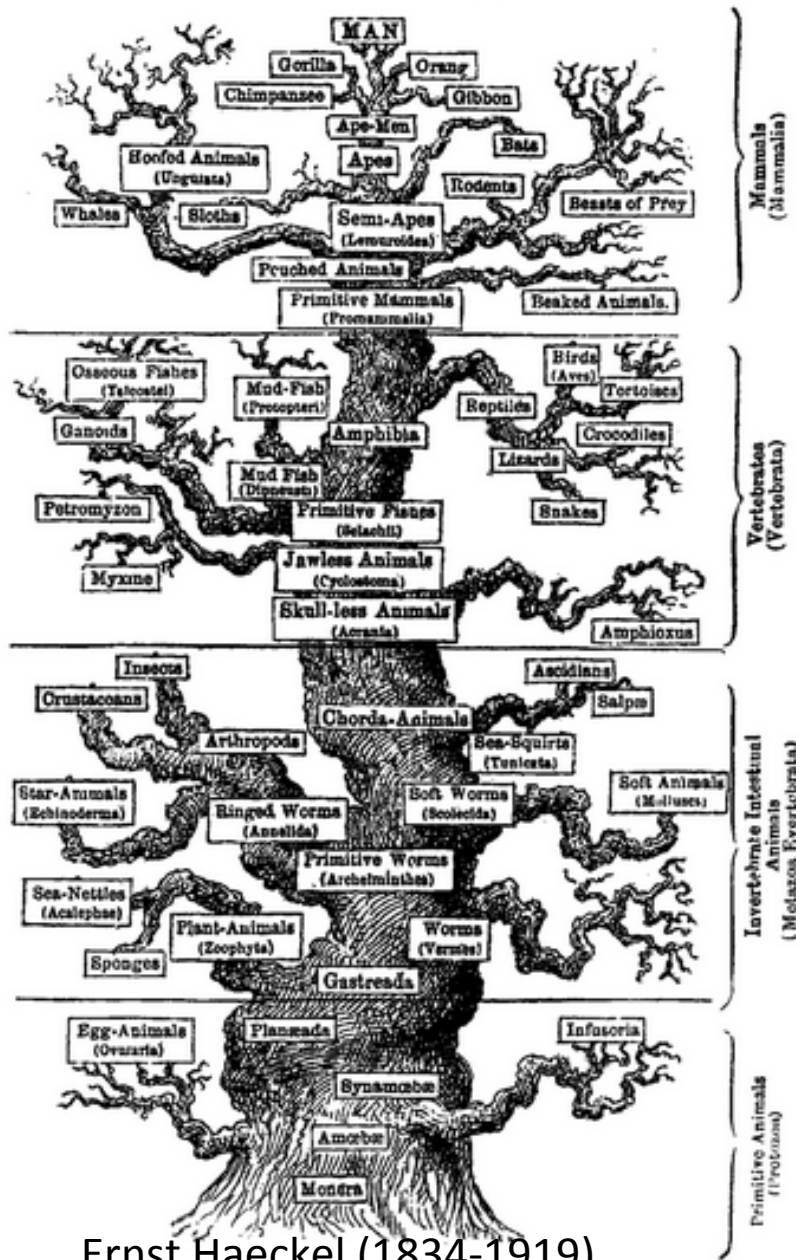


Even the scientific explanation of the relative position of humans in the natural world is loaded with values and judgements.

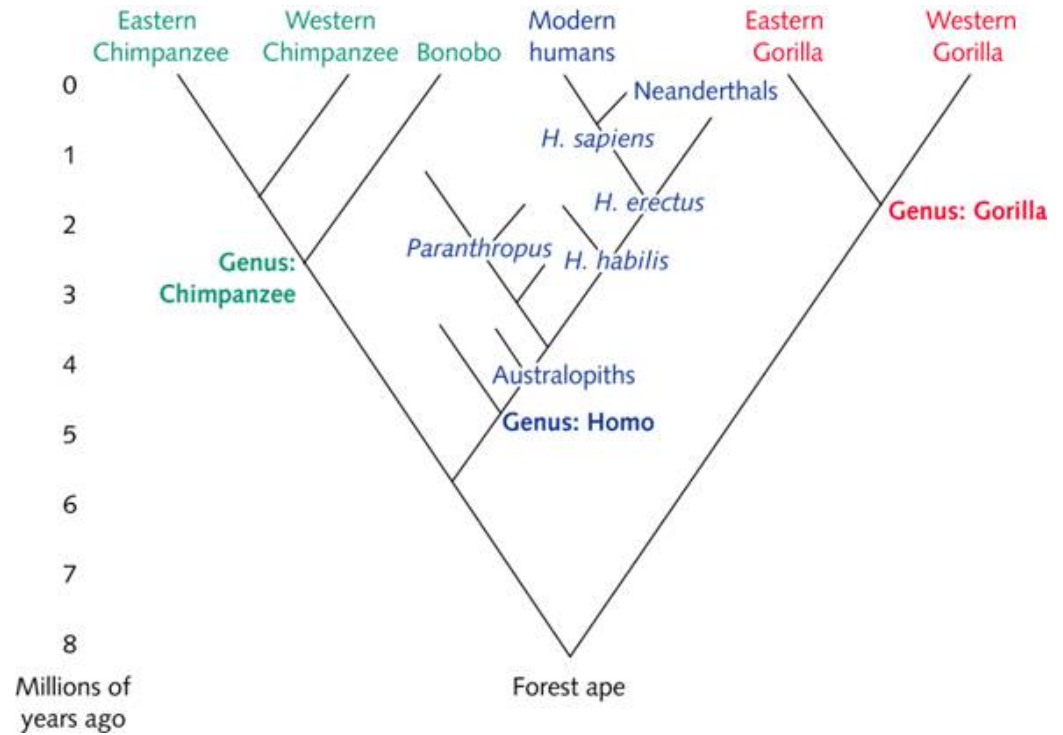
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Phylogeny as a tool of classification

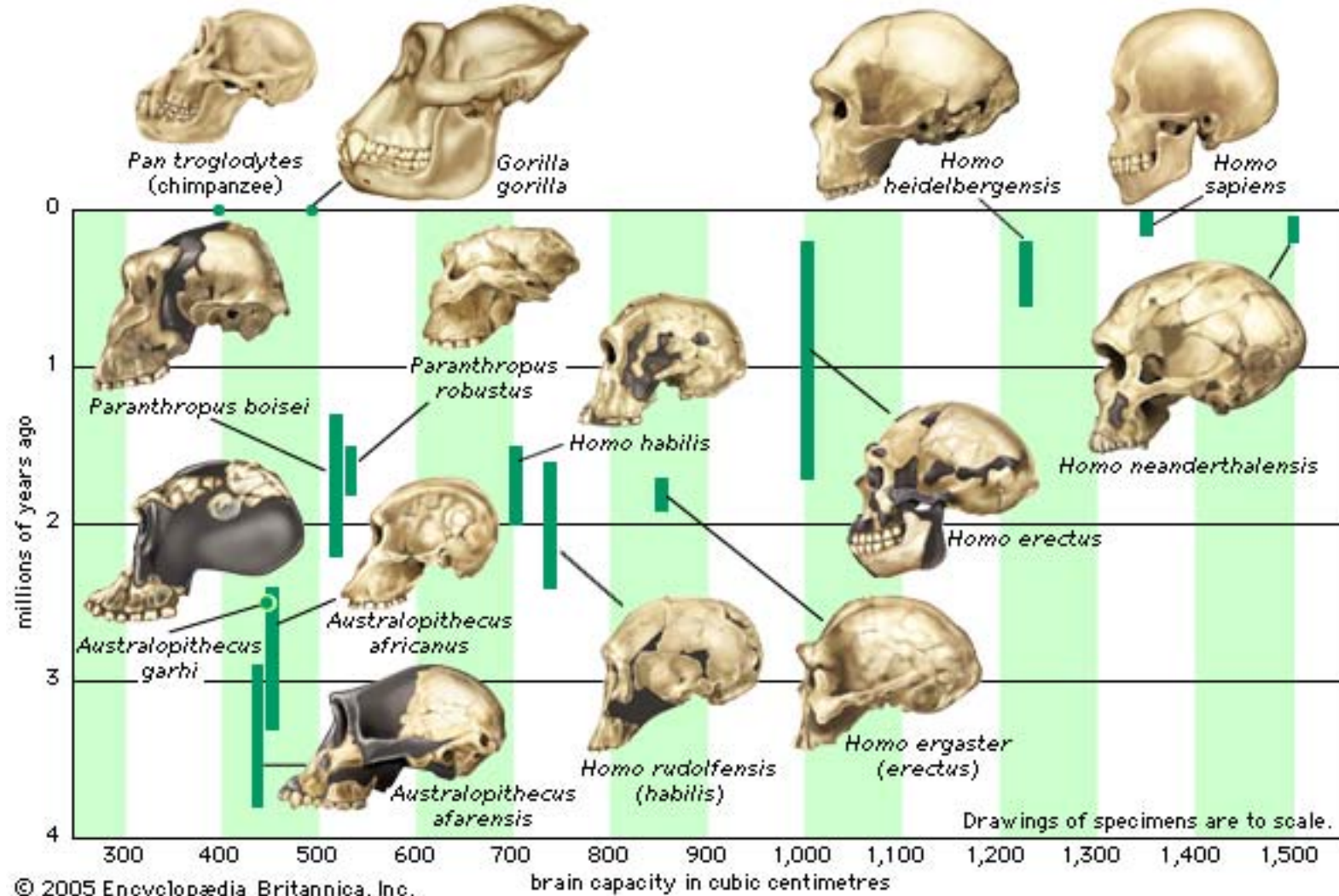
PEDIGREE OF MAN.



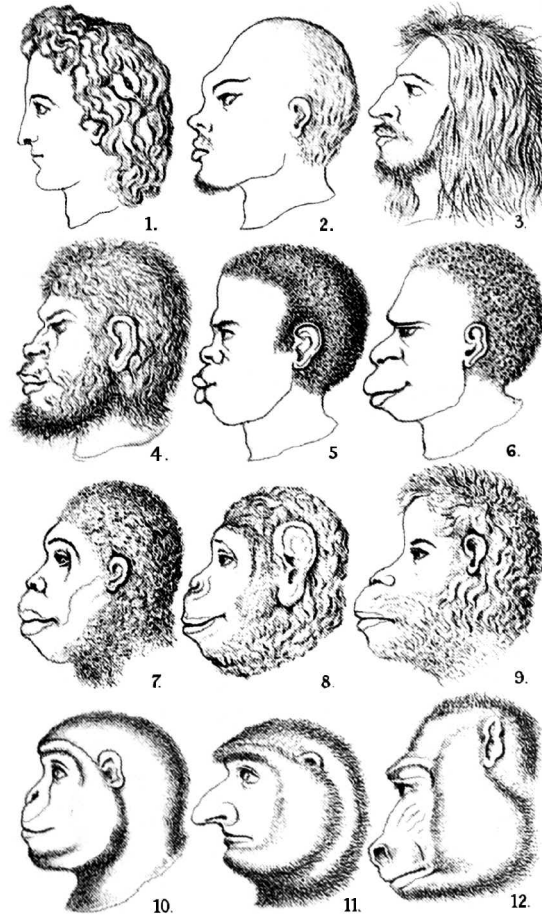
Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919)



Measuring human superiority



Measuring human superiority



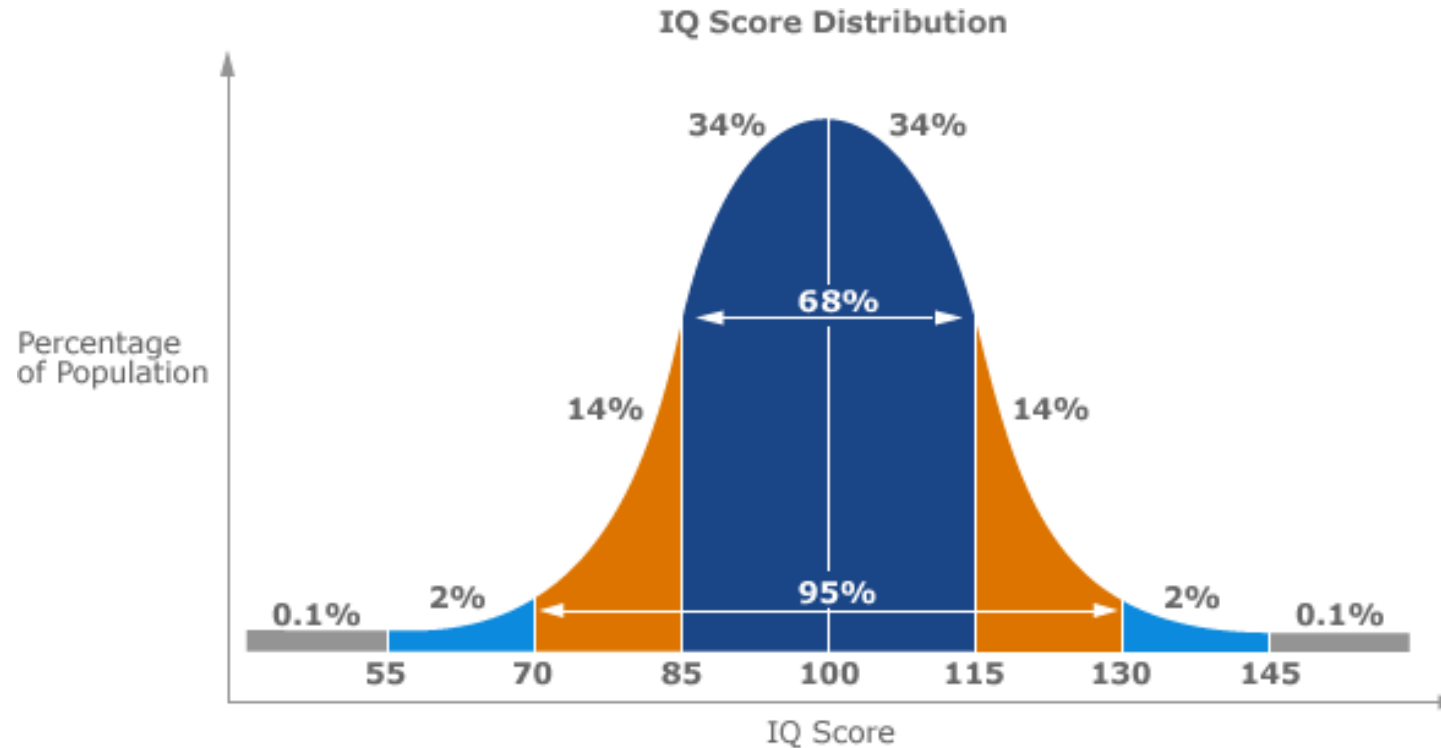
Die Familiengruppe der Kalarrhinen (siehe Seite 555).

Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919)

Science does not take place in a cultural vacuum

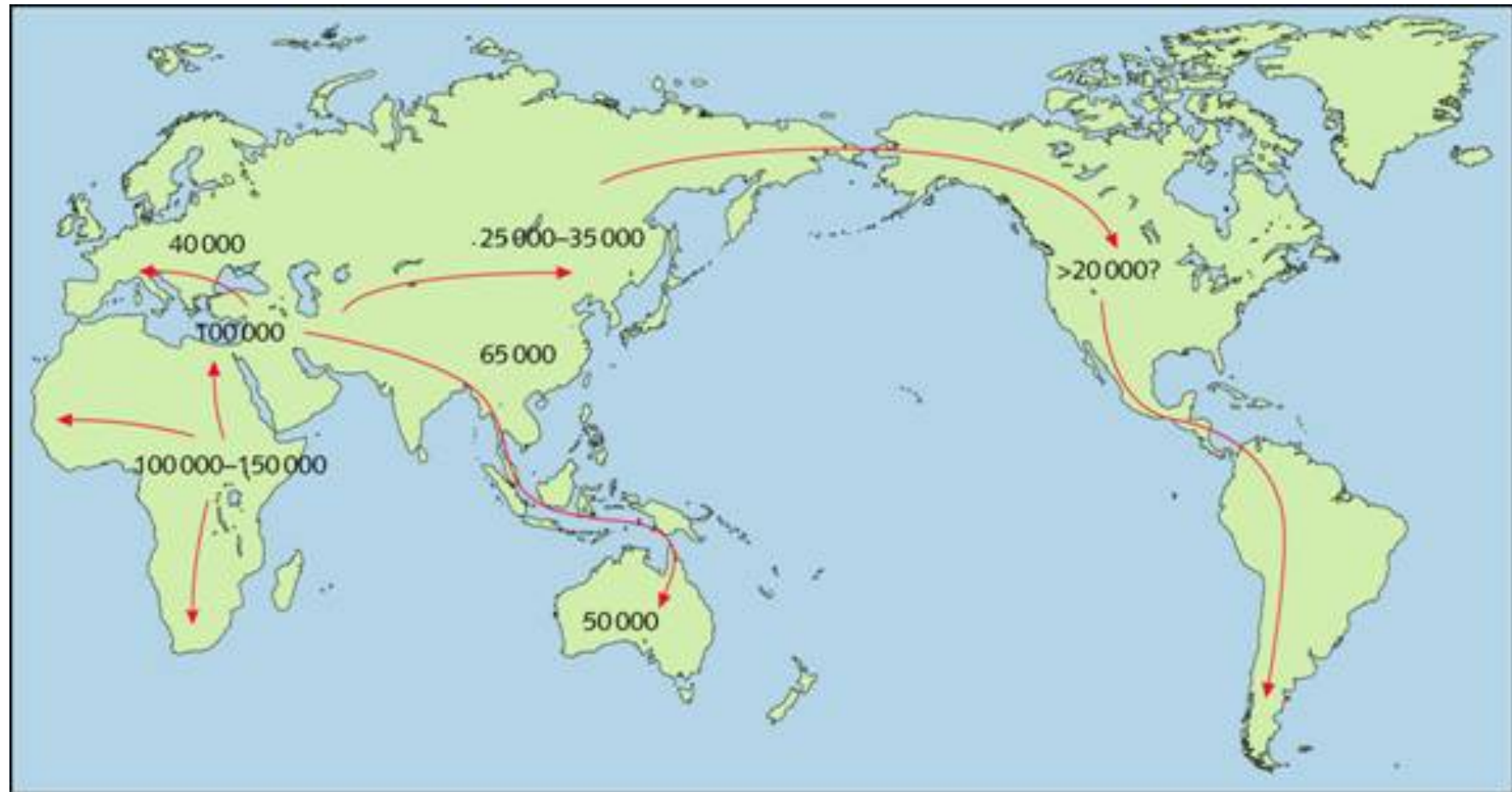
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Measuring human superiority



Science does not take place in a cultural vacuum

The spread of the intelligent animal



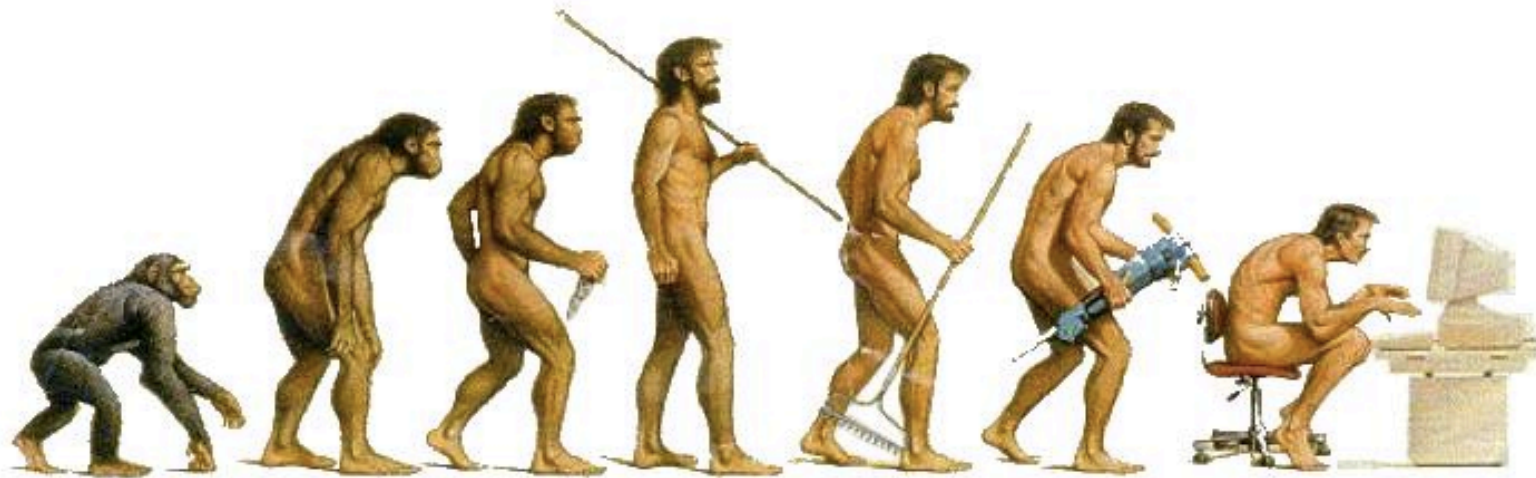
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Adapting nature to humanity: anthropization



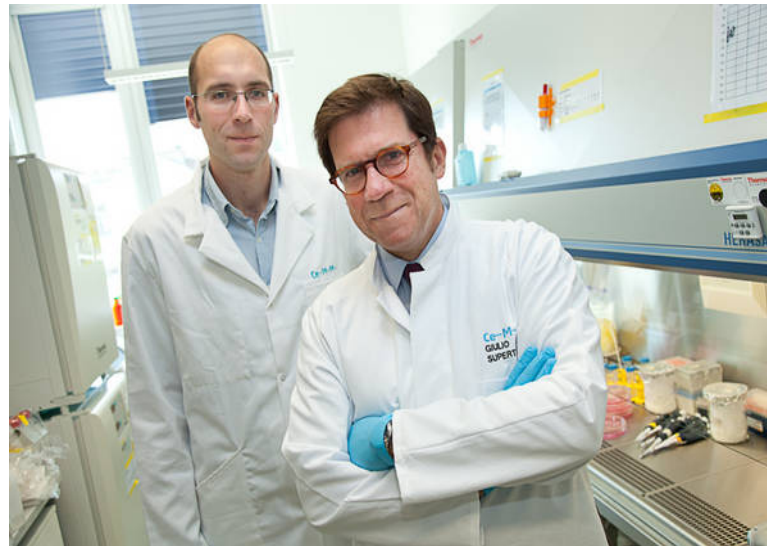
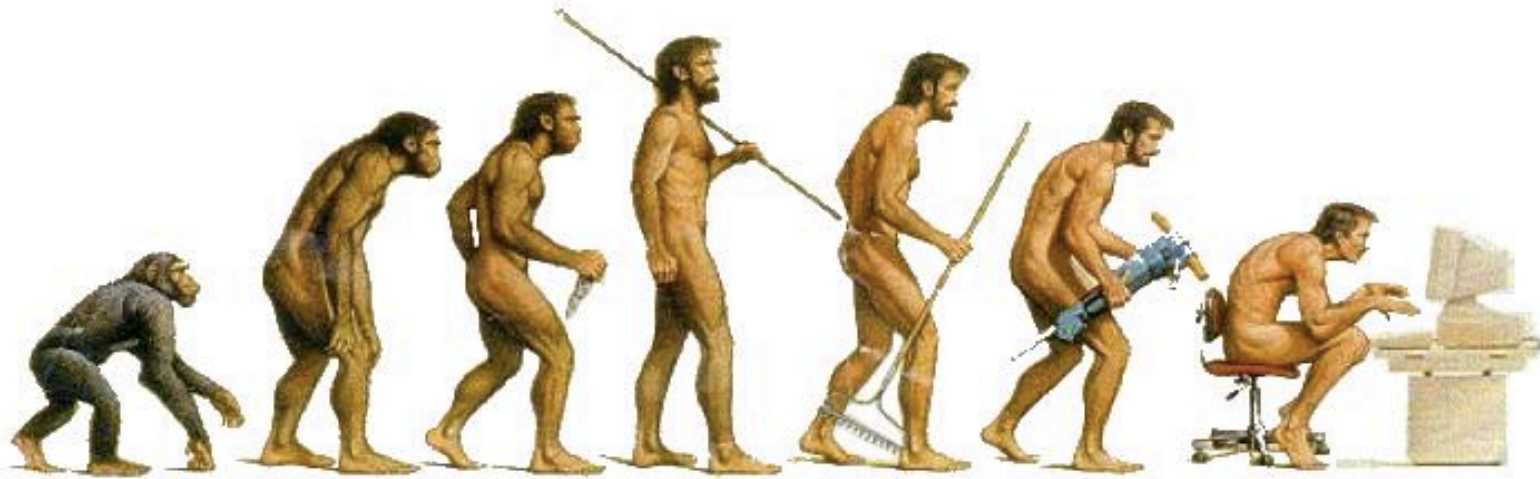
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More than just animals

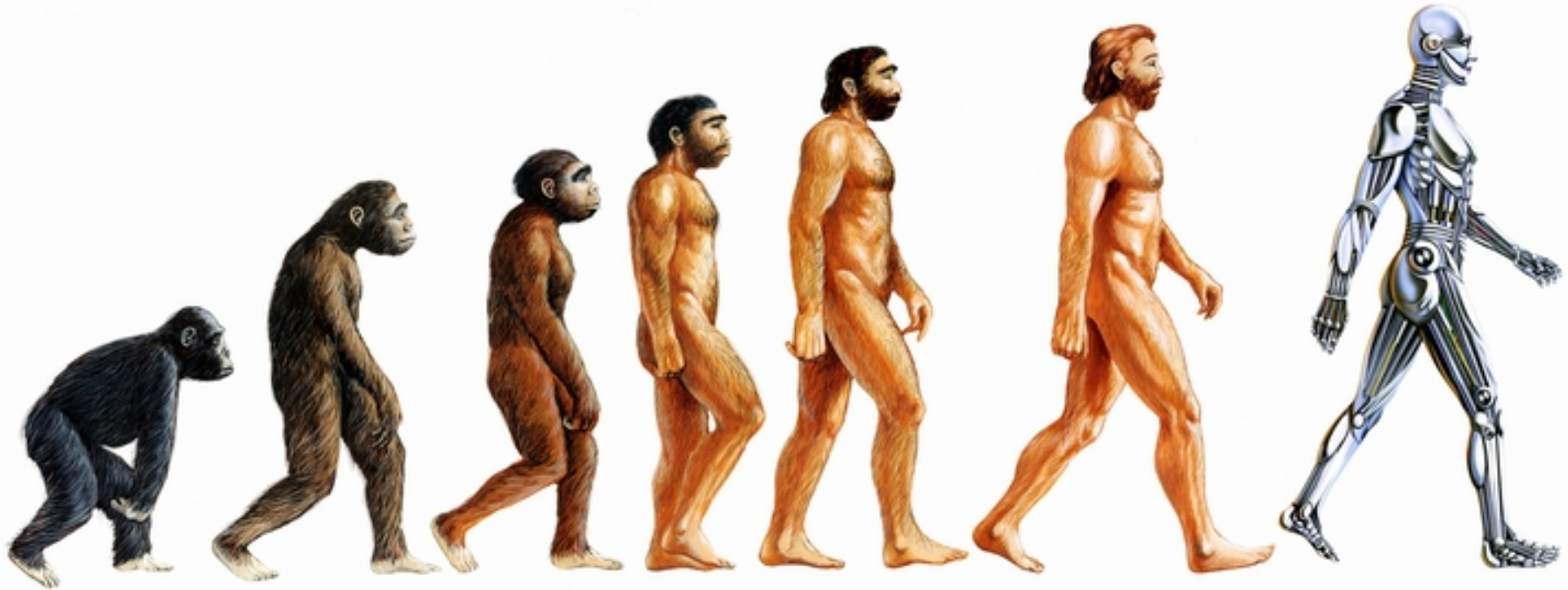


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More than just animals



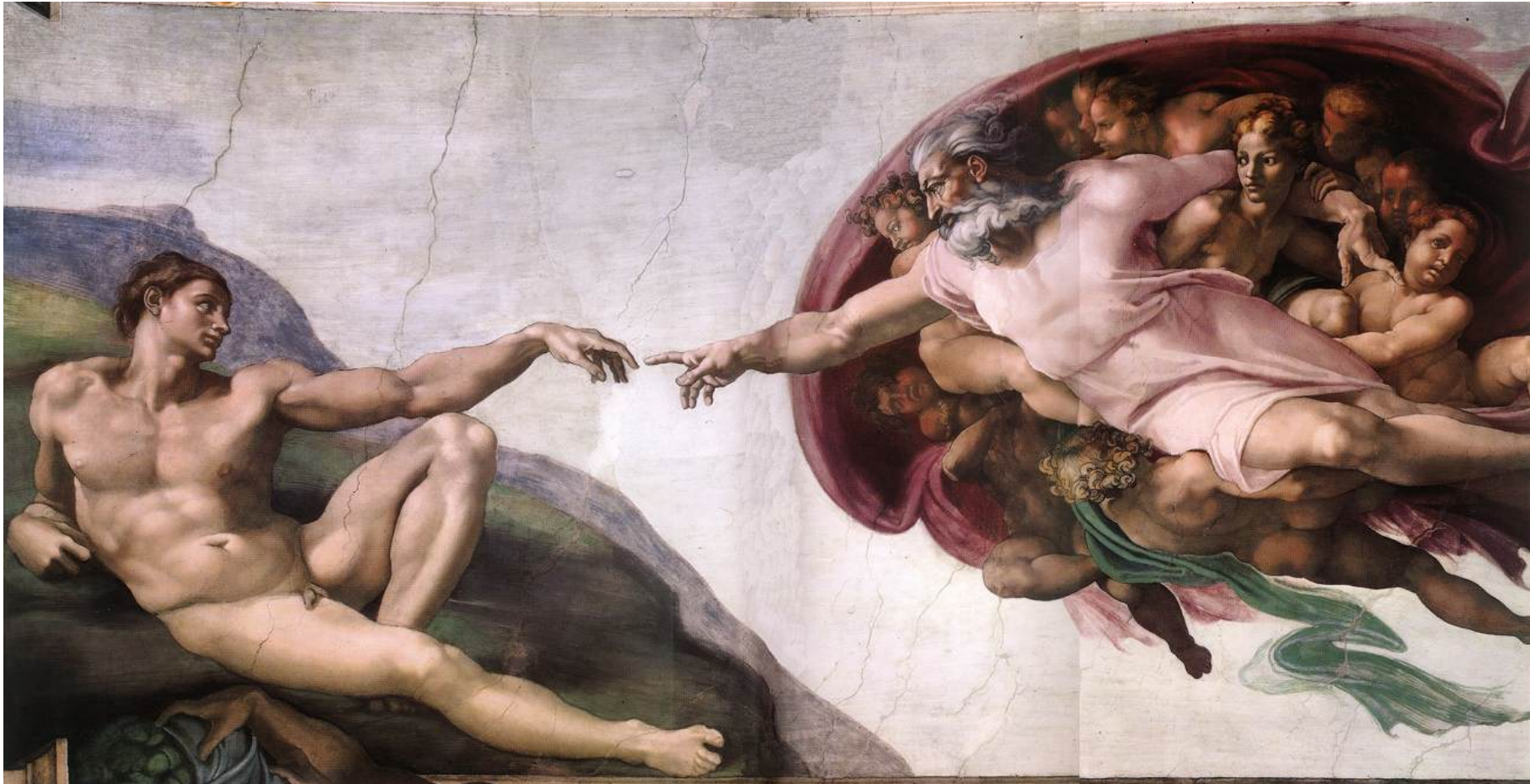
The anthropization of humans themselves



The birth of post-humanity?

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The anthropization of humans themselves: are we playing god?



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The anthropization of humans themselves: are we playing god?



A debate on human evolution and enhancement

Conclusions of Part 1

- 1. Our self-understanding incorporates powers and values.**
- 2. Science and technology do not happen in a cultural vacuum.**
- 3. In virtue of our powers and values, we have a transformative relationship with nature.**
- 4. Biotechnology empowers us to transform ourselves: enhancement.**
- 5. We have to reflect on the values that come with this power.**

Part 2

A conceptual analysis of “enhancement”

The enhancement debate

- The discussion about enhancement typically starts from considering a number of new technologies.
- Their use is imagined to be spread.
- The consequences of this are evaluated from a moral standpoint.

Philosophy as a market of ideas

Products on the market: ideas, concepts, theories (Ethics: what is right-wrong, good-bad).

Currency: arguments, evidence and eloquence.

Good arguments – poor arguments depending on their content in **logical consistency, empirical support and rhetoric power.**

Enhancement: a conceptual analysis

- 1. What is conceptual analysis: study of the use of a term in linguistic exchanges (in our case in professional philosophical debates).**
- 2. It's useful because it unveils the argumentative strategy of discussants – and thus allows us to evaluate their arguments critically.**

Enhancement: a tentative definition

“We define enhancement as an intervention that causes either an improvement in the functioning of some subsystem (e.g. long-term memory) beyond its normal healthy state in some individual or the addition of a new capacity (e.g. magnetic sense)” (Bolstrom 2008).

Enhancement: a tentative definition

“We define enhancement as an **intervention** that causes either an **improvement** in the functioning of some **subsystem** (e.g. long-term memory) beyond its **normal healthy** state in some individual or the addition of a new capacity (e.g. magnetic sense)” (Bolstrom 2008).

Mapping the concept

When the AIM of intervention is

Restore impaired function

Regenerate body part

Improve a function beyond normal

Acquire a new trait or function

Prevent a condition or a trait

Prolong lifespan

- Liver transplant
- Stem cell therapy
- Cocaine
- Ritalin (Methylphenidate)
- Caloric restriction
- Cancer therapy
- Memory consolidation pill
- Mind reading pill

Mapping the concept

Kinds of enhancement and relation to the body (ontology and metaphysics)

Natural (e.g. molecule)	Synthetic (e.g. molecule)
Artefact	Bio-material
Internal	External
Adjunct	Replacement

- A crutch
- A pace maker
- A drug
- Smartphones
- GPS
- A new kidney
- A modified gene

Mapping the concept

Delivery mode of enhancement

Nutrition	Injection
Implant	Genetic engineering
PGD + abortion	PGD + embryo selection
Gamete selection	Non-disease genes

- A pill
- Stem cells
- Vaccines
- Down syndrome screening
- Medically-assisted reproduction

Mapping the concept

Context of use of enhancement

Medicine	Public health
Eugenics	Sports
Personal life	Work life

- Gene therapy
- Ordinary drugs
- Doping
- Innovative training
- Viagra
- GPS
- Antidepressants (SSRi)

Mapping the concept

Context of use of enhancement

Medicine	Public health
Eugenics	Sports
Personal life	Work life

What is the difference between **enhancement** and **treatment**?

Mapping the concept

Kind of enhanced function

Physical capacity	Physical appearance
Psychological	Cognitive

- Increased maximum speed through drugs
- Increased resistance through training
- Plastic surgery
- Enhanced compassion
- Happiness pill
- Better memory

Mapping the concept

Rationale for enhancing

To achieve “A”

Based on evolutionary continuity (the wisdom of nature)

To avoid “B”

Based on best available scientific knowledge

Mapping the concept

Classification of enhanced function

Normal/not-normal	Artificial/natural
Improved/sub-optimal	Healthy/pathological
Beneficial/detrimental	Safe/risky

Mapping the concept

Context of decision and regulation

Individual	Parents
State / Law (bio-politics)	Market (bio-economy)
Philosophy (bio-ethics)	Religion

- Parents are free to decide for their children.
- Individuals are free to decide for themselves.
- The State should not promote the “best genes” (Eugenics)
- The legislator has to regulate.
- A free market can be good/bad.
- Moral thinking can be a guide.
- Religion can be a guide.

Conclusions of conceptual analysis

1. **Multiple conceptual parameters** articulate the discourse about enhancement.
2. Enhancement is deeply entangled with **medicine** and **reproduction**.
3. The **natural-artificial/normal-abnormal** axis seems to play a major role.
4. Novel kinds of intervention (e.g. **genetics**) seem to be given special attention.

Part 3

The philosophical debate on human enhancement

Debating the concept

Ethical positions about enhancement

Right to an open future	Enhancing evolution
Reproductive freedom	Trans-humanism
Procreative beneficence	Arms race, unequal access (justice)
Concerns about authenticity	Human nature should not be changed
Exploitation of/by sub-species	Value of individual well-being
The case against perfection	Nothing right or good in nature

Debating the concept

Ethical positions about enhancement

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Procreative beneficence

Introduced by Julian Savulescu

1. Some non-disease genes affect the likelihood of us leading the best life – e.g. a gene to be taller;
2. We have a reason to use information which is available about such genes in our reproductive decision-making;
3. Couples **should select** the embryos or foetuses that are most likely to have the best life.

*This approach is based on **rational choice** and rights*

Enhancing evolution view (1)

Introduced by John Harris

1. Enhancement is anything that improves our function: any intervention that increases our general abilities and allows the individual to flourish.
2. We already accept and encourage the use of many technologies that ought to be described as enhancement.
3. We **should** accept and encourage everything that can be described as enhancement under (1).

Enhancing evolution view (2)

Introduced by John Harris

2. We already accept and encourage the use of many technologies that ought to be described as enhancement.
3. **bis:** opponents of genetic enhancements must show that there is something particular about the use of gen-tech that renders these enhancements unacceptable, whereas the use of chemicals or mechanical enhancement is not.

*This approach is based on the primacy of individual **well-being** (treatment-enhancement unimportant)*

The case against perfection (1)

Introduced by Michael Sandel

1. When science goes faster than moral understanding, the language of autonomy, fairness and individual rights is insufficient.
2. In order to grapple with the ethics of enhancement we need to question the moral status of **nature** and the proper stance of human beings toward the **given** world.

The case against perfection (2)

Introduced by Michael Sandel

3. The deeper danger with enhancement is a kind of **hyperagency** – a **Promethean** aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires.
4. The drive to mastery misses and may even destroy an appreciation of the **gifted** character of human powers and achievements.

*This approach is based on **virtues** rather than on rights*

Enhancement: is a definition possible ?

- **Neither too narrow:** e.g. “only genetic interventions are enhancements” - it would create a double standard that might be difficult to justify.
- **Nor too broad:** e.g. “all ameliorations are enhancements” - it would prove too much and put under discussion also practices that are not considered ethically problematic – e.g. cancer drugs. It would associate contested (gen-eng) and uncontested practices (shoes).

A sharp definition may not be available

Enhancement: is a definition possible ?

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Ethical reasoning based on the conceptual parameters presented in part 2

Conclusions of part 3

1. **The philosophical debate features bio-conservatives and bio-liberals.**
2. **The values embedded in possible definitions may be irreconcilable: see rational choice, well-being, virtues.**
3. **A shared definition of enhancement may not be available.**

The notion of enhancement seem to be a conversation stopper: see enhancement v treatment

General conclusions

- 1. **Our self-understanding incorporates powers and values.**
 2. **Multiple conceptual parameters are used to distinguish what counts as enhancement and what doesn't.**
 3. **The philosophical debate features bio-conservatives and bio-liberals.**
- Let's argue about values, not definitions.
- Better to focus on what is feasible (case-by-case).
- and on the regulatory bottlenecks that await the translation of enhancing innovation into actual medical technologies.
- This last aspect systematically overlooked in the debate.

Acknowledgements

Gauthier Chassang

Alexandra Soulier

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