

Beyond Human Beings: The Perils and Promises of Transhumanism in Select Novels of Stephen King

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Abstract

Transhumanism advocates the deliberate utilization of technology to amplify and transcend human capacities while concomitantly ameliorating inherent human limitations. This recurrent theme permeates Stephen King's literary opus, enabling us to elucidate the ethical and philosophical ramifications intrinsic to transhumanism using his texts. King portrays characters who undergo profound metamorphoses catalyzed by scientific and technological interventions, arguably becoming exemplars of the transhuman ideal. However, these characters invariably find themselves ensnared in a web of unintended consequences arising from their enhancements. For instance, in *The Lawnmower Man* and *Cell*, King delineates individuals grappling with cognitive challenges who, through immersion in virtual reality programs or technological augmentation, attain unparalleled intellectual acumen. Similarly, in *Doctor Sleep* and *Duma Key*, King portrays individuals harnessing psychic abilities to extend their lifespans at the expense of others, as exemplified by the "True Knot," who ruthlessly prey on children who "shine." In *11/22/63*, King explores the time traveler's potential to irrevocably alter the course of history, asking ethical questions about the manipulation of historical events through technological means. *The Institute* portrays a clandestine organization that abducts children with psychic abilities, subjecting them to experiments to augment their already formidable powers. This article is a study of select novels by King, viewed through the lens of transhumanism.

Keywords: transhumanism, human augmentation, psychic abilities, ethical implications, Stephen King

Introduction

Transhumanism is a philosophical and ideological framework centered on the notion that through the utilization of scientific advancements and technological innovations, humanity can transcend its inherent biological limitations, thereby striving toward an elevated state of existence. This movement seeks to fundamentally reshape the human condition, both in physical and cognitive dimensions, with the ultimate aim of achieving a post-human state.¹ The term "transhumanism"

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¹ Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms Differences and Relations", *Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics, and the Arts*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2013), pp. 26-32.

was originally coined by the esteemed philosopher Julian Huxley in 1957. Max More, a prominent advocate of this ideology, elucidates that “Transhumanism is a philosophical movement that ardently advocates the utilization of science and technology to enhance various facets of human capacities, encompassing physical strength, intellectual prowess, and lifespan. Transhumanists firmly believe that these augmentations will ultimately usher in a new phase of human evolution, permitting individuals to transcend the inherent constraints of their biological nature.”² Transhumanism aims at surpassing the current limitations of human capabilities while concurrently ameliorating the overall quality of life for all members of society. At its core, this philosophy focuses on harnessing technology to enhance human experience, including enhancements in cognitive faculties, extension of lifespan, and exploration of novel states of consciousness. The ultimate aspiration is the creation of a new breed of humans who are no longer confined by biological constraints or subject to conventional evolutionary processes.

This movement derives inspiration from an array of disciplines, including biology, computer science, and philosophy.³ This multifaceted movement has practical applications as well as speculative theories, endorsing a comprehensive approach to shaping the future trajectory of humanity. Along with its futuristic aspirations, transhumanism is deeply engaged with ethical considerations. A significant contingent of its proponents actively address issues related to social justice and advocate for the promotion of environmental sustainability. They perceive technology as an invaluable tool to combat challenges like climate change and economic inequality, believing that it can play a pivotal role in fostering a more equitable and sustainable future for all humanity.

Stephen King’s Literary Oeuvre

Stephen King, a prolific American novelist celebrated for his innovative explorations of the horror and suspense genres, has demonstrated a keen interest in posthumanism and transhumanism in his novels. In his literary corpus, King probes the far-reaching implications of employing technology to either augment or supplant the faculties of the human body and mind. David J. Skal observes:

Stephen King stands as one of the most discerning contemporary authors when it comes to elucidating the perils that technology can pose. His narratives consistently delve into the multifaceted ways through which technology can be harnessed to dominate and manipulate individuals, thereby sounding a somber warning about the potential cataclysmic consequences of unchecked technological advancement.⁴

In a myriad texts, including *The Lawnmower Man*, *The Institute*, *Doctor Sleep*, *Duma Key*, *11/22/63*, and *Cell*, King explores the theme of transhumanism, meticulously dissecting the

¹ Max More, *The Future of the Body: Transhumanist Visions and Ethical Considerations* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003).

³ Rene Ostberg, “Transhumanism”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, February 2 (2024). At: www.britannica.com/topic/transhumanism.

⁴ David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 5.

advantages and pitfalls intrinsic to the harnessing of technology for the transcendence of human limitations. A salient example of King's exploration of transhumanism is *The Lawnmower Man*. In the film narrative adapted from King's novel, Dr Angelo (played by Pierce Brosnan), the central character, engineers a virtual reality program designed to amplify the cognitive faculties of an individual named Jobe (played by Jeff Fahey). Nonetheless, as Jobe's intellect undergoes exponential augmentation, his mental stability precipitously deteriorates, and he begins to exploit his newfound capabilities to manipulate the world around him. This narrative is a cautionary tale, serving to underscore the inherent dangers of leveraging technology to amplify human intelligence without a profound understanding of the potential repercussions.⁵ Conversely, in *The Institute*, King delves into the domain of transhumanism by means of probing the utilization of psychic abilities. The Institute is a research facility wherein children endowed with psychic gifts become subjects of harrowing experiments aimed at the enhancement of their extraordinary powers. Regrettably, these experiments manifest in brutal treatment, with the children enduring torture and various forms of abuse. Through *The Institute*, King brings to the fore the potential perils entailed in harnessing technology to elevate human capacities without ethical boundaries, thereby prompting a discourse on the ethics of employing vulnerable populations, especially children, as subjects of scientific experimentation. "The Institute was a place where children were stolen from their families and used for experiments. It was a place where children were tortured. It was a place where children were killed."⁶ This poignant quotation serves as a chilling expose of the Institute's malevolent activities, shedding light on the fate of by the innocent children held within its walls.

In *Doctor Sleep*, King continues his exploration of transhumanism, this time by examining the use of psychic capabilities as a means to attain immortality. The story revolves around Danny, a protagonist endowed with psychic aptitudes that facilitate communication with the deceased. As the narrative unfolds, Danny encounters a group of individuals who employ their psychic talents to siphon the life force ("shine") from others, thereby achieving a type of immortality: "The True Knot was a cult, but it was also a business. And the business of the True Knot was death. They were psychic vampires, feeding off the life force of others to extend their own lives. They were immortal, but at a terrible price."⁷ Works such as *Duma Key* and *11/22/63* further underscore King's multifaceted exploration of transhumanism, with themes ranging from the supernatural to time manipulation. In *Duma Key*, the protagonist, Edgar, undergoes a transformation in his artistic abilities following a severe injury, instigating contemplation on the inherent potentialities of the potential influence of supernatural forces. The narrator observes of the protagonist's artistic endeavors, "Edgar was painting things that he couldn't possibly have known about. He was painting things that were beyond his understanding. He was painting things that were supernatural."⁸ This insight into Edgar's enigmatic creations serves as a pivotal moment in unraveling the story's mysteries. Meanwhile, *11/22/63* details the consequences of manipulating

⁵ Stephen King, "The Lawnmower Man," in *Night Shift* (New York: Double Day, 1978); Brett Leonard (dir.), *The Lawnmower Man* (New Line Cinema, 1992).

⁶ Stephen King, *The Institute* (New York: Scribner, 2019), p. 45

⁷ Stephen King, *Doctor Sleep* (New York: Scribner, 2013), p. 11.

⁸ Stephen King, *Duma Key* (New York: Scribner, 2010), p. 150.

the course of history through time travel, and the ramifications of tampering with the fabric of human existence. *Cell* discusses the repercussions of a mysterious signal transmitted via cell phones, inciting individuals into a state of mindless violence. The narrative examines the potential consequences of widespread technological manipulation of human behavior. In Clay Ridell's perspective, "the signal was a weapon. It was a weapon designed to control people. It was a weapon designed to make people mindless and obedient,"⁹ an observation that underscores the central theme of the narrative. King's literary corpus offers many clarion calls regarding the perils of transhumanism.

Transhumanism in Stephen King's Characters

In King's books, a plethora of characters grapple with themes central to transhumanism, thereby engendering a profound exploration of their ethical, psychological, societal, and philosophical implications. A prominent illustration of this can be found in the character of Charlie McGee in *Firestarter*.¹⁰ Born with telekinetic and pyrokinetic abilities resulting from her parents' involvement in a clandestine government experiment, Charlie's existence begets profound ethical inquiries, challenging the morality inherent in subjecting individuals to scientific endeavors, wherein the relentless pursuit of progress may take precedence over individual well-being.

From a psychological standpoint, Charlie's odyssey serves as a harrowing portrayal of the mental toll exacted by transhuman enhancements. Her arduous struggle to harness and control her formidable powers emerges as a poignant allegory, shedding light on the complex psychological consequences of transcending the confines of conventional human capabilities. Her experiences underscore with stark clarity that the pursuit of transhuman abilities can impose a severe toll on one's mental health and stability. "Her arduous struggle to harness and control her formidable powers emerges as a poignant allegory, shedding light on the intricate psychological consequences of transcending the confines of conventional human capabilities."¹¹ In a societal context, Charlie's narrative unfolds against the backdrop of relentless government pursuit, resonating with the societal implications of unregulated transhumanism. Her extraordinary powers designate her as a prime target for government agencies, vividly illustrating the potential perils associated with unchecked transhuman capabilities and the resultant societal paranoia they may incite. "She was a threat, they said. A weapon. A monster. They had to stop her before she became too powerful."¹² This portrayal suggests the establishment desire to regulate human enhancements. Expanding upon the societal dimension, the quotation succinctly encapsulates the overarching theme of societal apprehension and government intervention in response to Charlie's transhuman abilities.

On a philosophical plane, Charlie's character provokes questions about the essence of humanity and the demarcation separating human attributes from superhuman ones. Her existence impels a reconsideration of established conceptions of humanity, focusing on the blurred

⁹ Stephen King, *Cell* (New York: Scribner, 2012), p. 100.

¹⁰ Stephen King, *Firestarter* (New York: Viking Press, 1980).

¹¹ King, *Firestarter*, p. 25.

¹² King, *Firestarter*, p.150

boundaries that transhumanism introduces into our comprehension of identity and existence. “What did it mean to be human? Was it defined by our biology, our emotions, or our capacity for love? Or was it something more than that?”¹³ This passage raises questions about the definition of human attributes in light of transhumanism, igniting a discourse on the intricacies of identity and existence that extends beyond conventional boundaries. Similarly, characters such as Roland Deschain in *The Dark Tower* series, who undergo simultaneous physical and psychological transformations, provide insights into the ethical dilemmas, psychological intricacies, societal ramifications, and philosophical conundrums that accompany transhumanism. Roland’s transformation and his relentless quest for the Dark Tower illuminate questions about his choices, the profound psychological ramifications of his journey, the societal repercussions of his actions, and the philosophical questions surrounding his pursuit of a transcendent objective.¹⁴ “The world has moved on. We live in a new age, gunslinger. And this new age has no room for such as you.”¹⁵ This quotation encapsulates the stark societal shift that underscores the transformative journey he embarks upon, emphasizing the deep changes that accompany his quest for the Dark Tower.

Hubris and the Quest for Power: A Cautionary Tale

Within the realm of transhumanist discourse, it is noteworthy that themes of hubris and the relentless pursuit of power frequently intersect, giving rise to complex narratives that delve deeply into the consequences of human ambition and the innate desire to transcend inherent limitations.¹⁶ Through his storytelling, King reveals how the unrelenting pursuit of power, whether propelled by scientific progress or supernatural means, can yield perilous outcomes when devoid of ethical constraints. Within the transhumanist framework, characters in King’s literary works frequently engage in experiments or employ technologies with the aim of augmenting their physical or cognitive capacities. This yearning for enhancement emanates from the belief that transcending human constraints will give them increased power and dominion. Nonetheless, these pursuits frequently manifest as cautionary tales, elucidating the potential hazards of unchecked hubris. Characters who succumb to their hubris and pursue transhumanist ideals often confront dire consequences, including the forfeiture of identity, moral degradation, or a descent into madness.

King explores humanity's vulnerability when confronted with overwhelming forces, whether of supernatural or technological origin. Transhumanist aspirations, when driven by hubris, may evolve into a source of existential peril, as the demarcation between human and machine becomes indistinct. The narrative tension emerges from the conflict between human limitations and the enticing promise of transcending them, challenging the cost of such undertakings and the

¹³ King, *Firestarter*, p. 200.

¹⁴ Michael R. Collins, *Scaring Us to Death: The Impact of Stephen King on Popular Culture* (San Bernadino: Borgo Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Stephen King, *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger* (Hampton Falls: Grant Books, 1982), p. 101.

¹⁶ Mark Coeckelbergh, “Cyborg Humanity and the Technologies of Human Enhancement”, in *Gale Cengage Learning Staff, Philosophy: Technology* (Boston, MA: Gale Cengage, 2017), pp. 141-160.

potential erosion of our collective humanity.¹⁷ Overall, Stephen King's exploration of hubris and the quest for power intertwines with transhumanist concepts, underscoring the perils of ambition and the ethical considerations that accompany yearning to transcend human confines.

The thematic exploration found within King's literary works conveys a cautionary narrative that utilizes transhumanist concepts and aspirations to impart a warning regarding the perils and adverse consequences associated with the pursuit of surpassing human limitations.¹⁸ In these narratives, transhumanist themes assume the role of cautionary tales. By portraying the darker facets of transhumanist ambitions, King's literary works admonish readers regarding the conceivable risks and detrimental consequences that can accompany the manipulation of the boundaries of human existence. These cautionary narratives serve as poignant reminders that the yearning for augmented abilities or eternal life can exact a steep price, both on an individual and societal level. King's wisdom is encapsulated in this statement, "If you give up your humanity to become something less than human, you're no better than the monster you're fighting."¹⁹ King offers insight into the consequences of tampering with human boundaries and the pursuit of transhumanist ideals. Readers can contemplate the hazards and pitfalls that may result from the unchecked pursuit of transhumanist objectives.

Power and Control through Transhumanism

King's use of transhumanist ideas generates narratives where individuals or groups employ them to secure dominance, wield influence, or assert authority over others, thus highlighting their role as catalysts for power and control. In King's books, transhumanist elements frequently serve as mechanisms bestowing individuals with augmented capabilities or superior attributes, affording them a competitive edge over their contemporaries. Characters who acquire these enhancements may exploit their newfound abilities to manipulate, dominate, or subjugate others. Characters propelled by the aspiration for supremacy employ transhumanist technologies or enhancements to advance their personal agendas, the detriment of others. Their objectives may be control or manipulation of society, reframing of the world in accordance with their ideas, or self-deification.²⁰

These narratives underscore the perils of unchecked power and the potential for transhumanist progress to exacerbate prevailing power differentials. They delve into the ethical ramifications and repercussions of employing transhumanist technologies or abilities as instruments of domination and control. By portraying transhumanism as a conduit for power and control, King's literary works function as cautionary tales, admonishing against the possible misuse and moral degradation that can manifest when individuals or groups wield transhumanist

¹⁷ Joeri Pacolet, *Transcendent Writers in Stephen King's Fiction: A post-Jungian Analysis of the Puer Aeternus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁸ D. M. Campbell, "A Cautionary Tale", *De Rebus*, no. 4 (1968): pp. 14-15.

¹⁹ Stephen King, *The Stand* (New York: Anchor, 2012), p. 1000.

²⁰ Thesalonika Alvina and Mike Wijaya Saragih, "The Archetypal Analysis on Main Characters of Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*", *Dialektika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Dan Budaya*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2023), pp. 118-127.

advancements as instruments of subjugation or manipulation. They impel readers to engage in critical contemplation regarding the ethical considerations and moral obligations associated with the pursuit and utilization of transhumanist technologies and enhancements.²¹

Psychic Abilities

In *Doctor Sleep*, King delves into the intriguing concept of prolonging human lifespans through the utilization of psychic abilities. The narrative centers around Dan Torrance, the adult offspring of Jack Torrance from *The Shining*.²² Dan grapples with both alcoholism and his psychic powers. His path converges with that of a young girl named Abra Stone, who possesses even more potent psychic capabilities than his own. Together, they confront a formidable group of psychic vampires known as the True Knot. This group sustains themselves by feeding on the “steam” or life force of children with psychic abilities. The “True Knot” members have extended lifespans. This enigmatic assembly comprises individuals who have managed to endure for centuries by subsisting on the steam extracted from psychic children. This enables them to not only extend their existence but also to preserve their youthful appearance. It is worth noting that King has previously explored analogous themes through the character of Roland Flagg in *The Dark Tower* series.²³ However, what sets *Doctor Sleep* apart is the portrayal of True Knot's desperation to maintain their immortality. They are unscrupulous in their pursuit of steam, killing innocent children. This desperation is rooted in their fear of death, which ultimately becomes their downfall. Conversely, Dan and Abra symbolize an alternative approach to the concept of elongating lifespans. They employ their psychic gifts to assist others and enhance their lives. While they do consume some steam to sustain their powers, it remains ancillary to their primary focus. Instead, their abilities are harnessed for benevolent purposes, bestowing upon them a sense of fulfillment and purpose. Dan and Abra also illustrate alternate paths wherein the use of their powers to aid others leads to a deeper sense of meaning, even while acknowledging their own mortality.

Corporations and Governments

In *The Institute*, Stephen King delves into the complex intersection of corporations, governments, and transhumanism, shedding light on the ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding the use of technology to engineer transhuman beings. The narrative unfolds through the experiences of Luke Ellis, a young boy possessing telekinetic abilities who becomes an unwitting captive in the clandestine facility known as *The Institute*. Within its secretive confines, Luke discovers that he is not the sole child endowed with supernatural gifts, and that the Institute's staff are harnessing these extraordinary abilities to advance their technological agenda. This novel serves as an allegory for the intricate relationship between corporations, governments, and the transhumanist movement.

²¹ Roberto Marzocco, *Transhumanism: Engineering the Human Condition* (New York: Springer Press, 2019).

²² Stephen King, *The Shining* (New York: Doubleday, 1977).

²³ Robin Furth, *Stephen King's The Dark Tower: The Complete Concordance* (London: Hachette, 2012).

The Institute operates with funding from a powerful corporation with close ties to the government, driven by the ambition to cultivate a new breed of humans with augmented capabilities. The belief underlying their pursuit is that these “transhumans” will serve as a panacea for global challenges, ranging from climate change to disease and poverty. James Canton observes thus:

Corporations and governments are increasingly involved in transhumanism. Corporations are investing in research and development of Transhuman technologies, while governments are formulating policies to regulate these technologies. This involvement has the potential to both accelerate and hinder the development of transhumanism.²⁴

The ethical dimension comes to the fore as the children are held captive and subjected to inhumane experiments for the sake of scientific advancement. This raises questions about the morality of engineering transhuman beings, particularly when it involves human experimentation that violates individual autonomy. Moreover, the narrative delves into the dynamics of power and control. The Institute's staff employ their technological advancements to manipulate and dominate the children, ultimately leading to a rebellion. This illustrates the perils of unchecked power, especially when bolstered by advanced technology. *The Institute* by King explores the convergence of corporations, governments, and transhumanism, unveiling ethical quandaries about the utilization of technology to craft transhuman beings. Furthermore, it underscores the inherent dangers of unbridled power, accentuating the potential hazards when wielded in conjunction with cutting-edge technology.

The Perils of Unbridled Scientific Progress

King's body of work frequently serves as a cautionary commentary on the dangers of unchecked scientific progress. While science undoubtedly possesses the potential to elevate the human condition and enhance the quality of life, King skillfully highlights the inherent risks associated with unbridled scientific advancement, emphasizing the unforeseen consequences that may arise. In his novels, King effectively illustrates how scientific pursuits can inadvertently result in devastation, suffering, and a loss of control. One illustrative instance of this thematic motif is apparent in *The Stand*, wherein a deadly virus, originally conceived within a laboratory setting, escapes containment, resulting in the decimation of a significant portion of the global population. “There's no cure. Nothing can stop it. It's going to wipe us out.”²⁵ This harrowing narrative serves as a stark reminder of the inherent risks associated with biological weapons research and the imperative need for stringent regulations to forestall catastrophic global events. In *Cell*, King probes the dangers of technology, specifically the ubiquitous cell phone. A mysterious pulse transmitted through phones transforms individuals into zombie-like entities, precipitating chaos and destruction. This narrative serves as a cautionary tale, elucidating the potential hazards of excessive reliance on technology and the urgency of exercising prudence and responsible usage.

²⁴ James Canton, *The Extreme Future: The Top Trends That Will Reshape the World in the Next 20 Years* (Boston: Dutton, 2006), 196.

²⁵ King, *The Stand*, p. 20.

In *The Dead Zone*, King narrates the tale of a man endowed with psychic abilities following a brain injury, unveiling the ethical quandaries that arise when wielding such powers for personal gain. Additionally, the novel delves into the perils of possessing immense power without guidance and responsibility. In *Firestarter*, King introduces a young girl with pyrokinetic abilities who becomes the target of a clandestine government agency seeking to harness her powers for their purposes. This narrative offers a poignant warning against unchecked government authority and underscores the indispensability of safeguards to protect individual rights and liberties. Collectively, King's books serve as didactic narratives, conveying cautionary messages regarding the risks associated with unbridled scientific progress. While science undoubtedly possesses the potential for profound benefit, King emphatically reminds us of the ethical dimensions and potential consequences that necessitate judicious and responsible scientific exploration.

Human Enhancement and Augmentation and the Implications of Robotics and Automation

The theme of human enhancement and augmentation emerges as a salient motif in King's literary oeuvre. Within the framework of transhumanism, as depicted in his works, we encounter the deliberate modification or enhancement of human capacities and attributes through diverse modalities, including technological, supernatural, or otherworldly means. King's narratives plumb the consequences stemming from these enhancements, probing their profound impact on physical, intellectual, and psychological dimensions. Characters inhabiting his stories undergo total metamorphoses, experiencing marked shifts in their abilities and, in some cases, even their identities. For instance, in *Carrie*, the unleashing of telekinetic powers in a young girl represents a pivotal transformation that fundamentally reshapes her existence and reverberates through the lives of those in her proximity. King's prose eloquently captures this transformative moment, as exemplified by the passage: "Something had happened to her. She didn't know what it was, but it had happened between the time she turned the water on and the time she looked down and saw the blood. Something inside her had clicked."²⁶ This excerpt serves as one of the initial instances in the narrative wherein Carrie discerns her burgeoning telekinetic abilities, marking a turning point in her self-realization. Despite her lack of comprehension, she unmistakably recognizes her divergence from the ordinary. The narratives frequently raise inquiries concerning informed consent, the enduring safety of these augmentations, and the existential ramifications on human identity and societal structures. King's incisive exploration of these ethical considerations resonates profoundly with the broader discourse on transhumanism.

Stephen King's oeuvre covers robotics and automation as transformative themes that closely align with the broader discourse on technology's profound impact on society.²⁷ King's narratives illustrate how advancements in technology, particularly in the domain of automation, possess the capacity to reshape the job market and the nature of employment itself. King's

²⁶ Stephen King, *Carrie* (London: Hodder, 2015), p. 45.

²⁷ Borja Garcia de Soto and Miroslaw J. Skibniewski, "Future of Robotics and Automation in Construction", in *Construction 4.0*, eds. Anil Sawhney, Michael Riley and Javier Irizarry (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 289-306.

characters grapple with the consequences of these shifts, offering a reflection of real-world debates on the ramifications of automation for human livelihoods. In a manner akin to the exploration of human enhancement within transhumanism, King's literary works delve into the mechanization of tasks that traditionally fell to humans. For example, in *The Stand*, the collapse of society and the emergence of a new world order following a devastating pandemic necessitate that characters adapt to a swiftly evolving technological landscape. The passage, "The world had changed, and they had to change with it. They had to learn new ways of doing things. They had to learn about new technologies. They had to learn to live without the things they had taken for granted,"²⁸ underscores the imperative for the characters to acclimate to the exigencies of their transformed environment. This means acquiring novel skills, embracing emergent technologies, and recalibrating their very modes of existence; an arduous yet indispensable process for their survival. While automation offers the promise of heightened efficiency and precision, King's narratives accentuate the concomitant potential for the obsolescence of employment opportunities and the anxiety surrounding professions facing extinction. They highlight the profound influence of technology on our collective future. By interweaving these transhumanist themes into his storytelling, King accomplishes not only the task of entertaining but also extends an invitation to readers, prompting contemplation of the ethical and societal implications inherent in the utilization of technology to modify human nature and effect comprehensive transformation in our world.

Transhumanism, Altered States of Consciousness, and the Ethical Imperative

Within King's literary inquiries, the theme of altered states of consciousness assumes a substantive role, providing a transhumanist perspective as a lens through which to examine the confines of the human experience. King's narratives delve into the implications of probing and manipulating human consciousness through diverse modalities, encompassing the supernatural, technological, and psychological domains. This thematic strand within his works aligns with the transhumanist preoccupation with expanding the horizons of human awareness and perceptual capabilities. In King's stories, characters embark on journeys into altered states, catalyzed by encounters with the supernatural, possession of telepathic aptitudes, or the ingestion of mind-altering substances. These altered states engender revelations, metamorphoses, and heightened cognitive prowess, echoing the speculative aspirations of transhumanists regarding the advantages in gaining access to altered realms of consciousness. King's narrative exploration of altered consciousness further extends to the domain of neurotechnology, virtual reality, and cognitive enhancements, aptly reflecting transhumanist ideas regarding the utilization of advanced technological tools to induce states conducive to amplified creativity, problem-solving capabilities, and accelerated learning. Nevertheless, as the characters in King's books traverse these altered states, a constellation of ethical dilemmas surfaces, resonating with broader transhumanist discourse. King's examination of these ethical considerations within his narratives poignantly underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of transhumanist perspectives on the subject of altered states of consciousness.

²⁸ King, *The Stand*, p. 528.

King's novels have engaged readers with their intellectually stimulating narratives, frequently illuminating contemporary societal issues. A recurring motif in his literary works pertains to the imperative need for rigorous ethical deliberations amid the relentless march of scientific progress, particularly in the context of transhumanism. Through his artful storytelling, King adeptly underscores the potential perils that emerge when scientific and technological advancements are pursued devoid of ethical constraints. In exemplary novels such as *The Institute* and *Doctor Sleep*, King delves into the ominous consequences of untrammelled scientific experimentation and the unrestrained harnessing of supernatural abilities. *The Institute* vividly portrays a research facility where children are subjected to brutal experiments aimed at augmenting their psychic powers, serving as a cautionary allegory that vividly illustrates the dangers lurking in scientific progress divorced from ethical moorings. Similarly, *Doctor Sleep* explores the allure and repercussions of wielding unchecked psychic prowess, thereby illuminating the inherent hazards of possessing such powers bereft of responsible oversight. These cautionary narratives thoughtfully parallel the real-world ethical quandaries that permeate the transhumanist movement. In the pursuit of human enhancement and augmentation, ethical dilemmas become increasingly salient. Dialogues encompassing genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and human-machine interfaces necessitate rigorous scrutiny in the realms of consent, equity, fairness, and the long-term implications of such endeavors.²⁹ As we navigate the intricate terrain of transhumanism, Stephen King's literary works serve as an enduring testament to the moral obligation that accompanies scientific progress. They admonish us to approach the vistas of transhumanist possibilities with judiciousness and an unwavering ethical compass. By heeding these sagacious lessons, we can endeavor to shape a future in which technological progress is not solely innovative but also profoundly respectful of the essence of humanity.³⁰

Conclusion

In summation, Stephen King's literary oeuvre constitutes a powerful corpus of work, which adeptly serves as a didactic instrument, elucidating the pitfalls inherent in the pursuit of scientific advancement within the purview of transhumanism. His narratives eloquently exhort us to engage in profound contemplation regarding the ramifications of our endeavors and advocate for the imperative integration of ethical considerations in this nascent field. Works like *The Institute* and *Doctor Sleep* poignantly illustrate the potential harm that can befall humanity when scientific pursuits neglect the principles of individual well-being and human dignity. King's eloquent prose resounds with an unambiguous message: ethical restraints and the responsible application of technology are paramount in averting the dire consequences portrayed in his literary creations.³¹ His stories underscore the inalienable values of equity, justice, and inclusivity in the research,

²⁹ Steven John Thompson (ed.), *Global Issues and Ethical Considerations in Human Enhancement Technologies* (Hershey: IGI Global, 2014).

³⁰ Siân Bayne, "Posthumanism: a navigation aid for educators", *On Education: Journal for Research and Debate*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2018).

³¹ Paul Simpson, *A Brief Guide to Stephen King* (London: Hachette, 2014).

development, and equitable distribution of transhuman technologies. In light of this, King's novels assume the role of a clarion call, reminding us of the requirement for stringent ethical guidelines and regulations to govern the proliferation of transhuman technologies.³² These ethical underpinnings stand as sentinels, steadfastly safeguarding human dignity and unwaveringly upholding the tenets of justice and fairness. In sum, King's literary opus serves as an intellectual lodestar, beckoning us toward a transhumanist future that not only preserves our humanity but also reveres our cherished values, fostering an equitable and just society for all.

³² Furth, *Stephen King's The Dark Tower: The Complete Concordance*.