Laurence Radford October 8th, 2025

Transhumanism is quietly influencing UK tech policy

As the UK positions itself as a leader in AI and frontier tech, ideas rooted in transhumanism are starting to influence national policy. From research centres to Whitehall, visions of how technology can integrate with the human body are gaining traction, often without public debate. As trade talks and regulatory decisions unfold, ***Laurence Radford*** *argues that more transparency and democratic accountability is needed to control these powerful emerging technologies.*

In recent years, the UK has attempted to establish itself as a global leader in AI and frontier technologies. High-profile initiatives like the Bletchley Park AI Safety Summit and the formation of the AI Security Institute reflect this ambition. But beneath these efforts, a deeper set of values are shaping government policy with its foundation in transhumanism.

Transhumanist thinking, which advocates the enhancement of human capabilities through technology, is often associated with Silicon Valley utopianism. Yet in the UK, it has begun to shape research and political agendas more quietly and structurally. Without invoking the name, the UK is adopting many of the movement's core assumptions: that the human body's limitations are problems for engineering; that technology should extend our mental and physical capacities; and, in its purest form, that we must prepare for a future in which bodies and artificial intelligence merge to create a posthuman species.

This influence raises concerns for the direction of UK tech policy. Campaigners and economists have argued the government's push to promote economic growth through trade deals is driving a permissive regulatory environment, including of Big Tech, which would enable investment in, or at least not restrict, the proliferation of transhumanist technologies. Deepening awareness of transhumanism's intellectual influence on policymaking, among the public and state officials, would

increase accountability and foster a more informed debate about its ethical, social and political consequences.

Transhumanist research and Whitehall policymaking

Silicon Valley is often viewed as providing the ambition and capital to pursue transhumanist goals, while UK research institutions have built the intellectual foundation. Oxford's Future of Humanity Institute (FHI) – funded by US tech titans including Elon Musk before its controversial closure in 2024 – and Cambridge's Centre for the Study of Existential Risk have been instrumental in the idea that AI could pose existential risks to human society. To achieve the goal of a posthuman future through technological progress, human civilisation must first survive.

Such ideas have moved beyond the university campus to shape how UK policymakers think about AI's risks and promises, with transhumanism's key proponents providing evidence to parliamentary committees and shaping parliamentary debate.

While these institutions rarely market themselves as "transhumanist", this framing of technology's potential to wipe out humanity, or at the very least transform it in a fundamental way, has become the bedrock of the movement. Figures such as former FHI director Nick Bostrom, a leading transhumanist philosopher advocating the colonisation of space and the creation of digital beings, have emphasised the need for ethical governance to shape AI's trajectory. Such governance should ensure ethical priority is given to safeguarding humanity far into the future – a core tenet of longtermism, which the FHI had also driven the research literature on – even if sacrificing short-term democratic or regulatory constraints. As long as humanity's survival is unthreatened, innovation should accelerate to create a more robust human, or post-human, who can better weather future risks.

These conclusions can seem outlandish on the surface. But such ideas have moved beyond the university campus to shape how UK policymakers think about AI's risks and promises, with

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The UK government's Frontier AI Taskforce, established in 2023 and later absorbed into the AI Safety Institute (now the AI Security Institute), has direct intellectual links to longtermist and transhumanist circles. Several of its initial key advisers are a part of this ecosystem. This influence has helped elevate the framing of "existential risk" over the technology as merely a tool of economic productivity or social transformation.

Beyond this broader framing, transhumanism is influencing how Whitehall departments think about using frontier technology to address political and economic challenges. The Ministry of Defence has published work that argues, militarily, countries need to develop "human augmentation" or risk surrendering influence and security to those who will. The Ministry has also discussed the legal challenges of creating "cyborgs" and commissioned research into the cultural challenges of preparing a society for the integration of humans and machines. Additionally, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has explored the technological potential for cognitive and bodily enhancement to address labour shortages – potential use cases in an age of economic and geopolitical uncertainty.

Transhumanism and research into human enhancement

Beyond immediate policy influence, transhumanist ideals have begun to shape government research funding into frontier technologies' application. The UK's primary research arms, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Wellcome Trust, have supported a growing number of projects that seek to push the boundaries of human enhancement.

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Investments include brain-computer interfaces to improve human cognition, longevity research to slow biological aging and AI-powered brain stimulation aimed at optimising psychological

performance. The UKRI has also conducted research into the ethics of "human augmentation technologies", given increasing amounts of such R&D investment. The Defence Ministry has also funded research projects seeking to advance how technology can integrate with the human body in military settings.

While some of these projects are noble in their aim of alleviating debilitating disease, they are underpinned by a contested set of assumptions. These include the belief that natural human limitations such as ageing and cognitive limits are technical problems to fix. An emphasis on the human body and mind as systems for engineering reflects a core tenet of transhumanist ideology: the pursuit of enhancement over acceptance of biological constraints.

State investment in enhancement technologies raises ethical questions: should public money be spent enhancing already healthy individuals? Could increasing access to biotech products redefine the boundaries of medical necessity, pressuring citizens to improve themselves to remain competitive in the market? Moreover, enhancements and advanced AI tools may benefit elite populations disproportionately, especially if access is granted through private companies and patents.

Post-Brexit policy and regulatory pressure from the US

The UK's approach to frontier technologies is unfolding in a post-Brexit context, where the Government is pursuing international trade deals to kickstart its ailing economy. As a condition of closer UK-US trade ties, the US has pushed for weaker regulatory standards in digital and biotech sectors, which differ from more cautious AI safety frameworks emerging in the European Union. Notably, at the 2025 AI Safety Summit, only the UK and US withheld signing the international declaration committing to an "inclusive" and "ethical" approach to AI development.

Aligning with the US model, which favours self-regulation, market freedom and rapid innovation, could mean the UK ceding regulatory sovereignty in crucial areas such as AI, public health and bioethics. What "elite governance" means is then outsourced to Big Tech rather than under national or globally coordinated control. Indeed, American tech companies like OpenAI, Meta and Google DeepMind (based in London but US-owned) promote long-term goals that align with transhumanist ideals, such as "superintelligence", brain emulation and digital immortality. For this reason, ongoing UK-US digital trade negotiations have already raised concerns among AI ethicists.

If transhumanism is to play some role in shaping UK tech policy, then its values and assumptions must be openly debated through inclusive policymaking, not left to the vision of a technological elite.

If the UK yields to US pressure, such outsourced regulatory control could also entrench a future in which the societal impacts of new technologies are considered only after harm has occurred. The trajectory of social media offers a cautionary tale: unregulated innovation followed by reactive governance, often too late.

Tech policy needs democratic oversight

The UK's emerging tech policy is far from ideologically neutral, intentionally or not. Public attention often focuses on immediate concerns like job loss or data privacy, but far less public scrutiny has been given to the deeper implications of human enhancement-driven policy, from cognitive augmentation to life extension. The government's push for "pro-innovation regulation" risks embedding these pursuits without democratic accountability.

At stake is the question of how we retain public control over powerful emerging technologies. If transhumanism is to play some role in shaping UK tech policy, then its values and assumptions must be openly debated through inclusive policymaking, not left to the vision of a technological elite.

FAQ: What is transhumanism? Transhumanism is a philosophical and scientific movement that seeks to use technology to enhance human physical and cognitive capacities beyond their natural limits. It envisions a future where humanity transcends biological constraints through innovations such as genetic engineering, artificial intelligence and cybernetic augmentation.

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About the author

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