

Philosophical and Cultural Aspects of Transhumanism and Posthumanism

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The article discusses the mechanisms of improving the human organism presented in past centuries' culture and analogous phenomena present in contemporary cultural texts. On this basis, theoretical and speculative aspects of posthumanism and transhumanism are described, their literary realizations, and finally, their cultural consequences are presented. Ideas, movements and ideologies, or even philosophies of posthumanism and transhumanism, although affecting the common problematic area, still cause confusion because of their mutual confusion with each other. The article tries to find arguments for the position that posthumanism and transhumanism stand in one house, but the latter is less suitable for understanding the radically changing world that we experience in such a painful way.

Keywords: ancient myth, enhancement of human, a history of culture, posthumanism, transhumanism, popular culture

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Introduction

When we consider ideas of transhumanism about the enhancement of human beings, however, arises the question of whether this approach is really so new or if it also has its deep cultural history? In order to look more closely at this problem, it would be worth taking advantage of the diachronic perspective. In this context, the essential point of reference will be texts and cultural phenomena (Sapeńko & Trocha, 2019).

Magical technologies of improvement of human in a culture

Human agency, considered from a cultural perspective, contains at the same time the body, consciousness and will. This means from the point of view of the human condition, one can speak about somewhat appears as permanent and what is changeable. Moreover, what is changing becomes the object of attempts to interfere in man and the effects of this interference. These aspects of human agency, mainly because of their variability, seem to be extremely attractive moments for various movements, ideologies and views. Usually, this consists of this variability to some model or, secondly, transform this variability to some optimal constant issue. In this case, the most important is that the variable aspects determining the human condition are, by definition, extremely susceptible to design thinking.

The source and genesis of a humankind man are described by the mythological, theological and philosophical texts. Although they are essentially different, they all try to capture the moment of human origin — if the assumed cognitive option allows for it. However, above all, they try to put human existence into a cognitive model that explores both the mechanisms governing human existence and their consequences. In an excellent number of these attempts, man is described as a creature not only complex but, above all, imperfect. The confrontation of this imperfection of the human condition with the results of the human mind speculations, and subsequently, addiction to them the visions of the structures of the Universe has been led to the specific recognition of the human being as the *homo viator*. He was a man aiming both towards his biological destiny but also being in the permanent process of improvement. Moreover, this improvement has many different aspects: spiritual, physiological, and also strictly technical improvement of man. Narratives about human agency that emerged within the above-mentioned aspects will refer to specific models of human improvement.

In various cultural visions and ideas of correcting a person, one can see it in the best way. This phenomenon has a very long history, and it is, in its own roots, is entirely unrelated to the ideas that were underlying of transhumanism and posthumanism. In many archaic and traditional cultures, we can see the attempt to improve man and usually, it is connected with the myths and rituals present in these cultures and the fact that the members of these cultures refer to the surrounding reality through myths and rituals. They make the ritual corrections in the human biological structure in accordance with the mythical ideal. They assume that only in this way, a man can be terminally embodied his nature. Furthermore, they have been accomplishing it by various forms of circumcision, correction of teeth, or even ritual mutilation.

Another aspect of correcting a human is connected with a hybrid figure that often appears in mythical content. It combines in one agent the physiological characteristics of various beings selected in this way that it could serve to optimize the functions assigned to this particular form. They could be the wings, a supernatural strengthening of the skin, making it impenetrable for any weapon. It could be a divine destruction gaze or vipers that grow on the head like hair. The hybrid is the most popular version that could be seen in supernatural forms,

such as pegasus or centaur, but it could also appear in heroes' characters. The more complex case is the beast's figure, that is, a creature that does not have natural premises for its existence, not as it is gone on in the case of lycanthropic ideas or even Giants from Greek mythology. The difference between the hybrid and the beast also manifests itself in their actions. If these acts are strictly destructive and have demonic traits, one can usually talk about the beast. The last type of the corrected agent is the hero, who does not have to be a possession of physiological implants resulting in supernatural possibilities. He just governs them because of the divine element inside him. This can be seen in heroes like Heracles or Tereźjasz, as well as in Achilles and Theseus.

Another aspect of correcting a human being is not so much interference into his agency but equips him with various functional artefacts. It can be a flying carpet, a magic sword, or cudgel in a bag or seven-mile shoes. Most of these artefacts are found in folklore messages — they are enchanted instruments, dishes, tools, or garments. These artefacts produce effects that usually have consequences that go far beyond the individual desires and needs of a particular hero. They exhibit many features of objects that have taken part in the mythical events associated with the Beginning of the Cosmos and the world's course.

In addition to the artefacts, you can also point to the immortals' figures (The Eight Immortals) presented in China's culture, both in folklore and Taoist tradition. The biographies of these creatures indicate that immortality in China's cultural ideas appears not only as a certain wishful fiction but also as a specific model to implementation. This is indicated not only by the texts of legends related to the Immortals but also by the specificity of Chinese alchemy aimed at achieving immortality. To the other aspects connected with the process of enhancement of human beings, we can also count the levitation, the walking on water, or the possibility of contact with supernatural beings.

However, another motif present in culture is the phenomenon of the so-called "External Soul" (Frazer, 2002). It allows humans to believe that they can transcend their own body and wander outside their borders in traditional cultures. Thus, it is somehow liberated from the time and space constraints in which the human body is entangled.

In modern culture, the ideas associated with the process of enhancement of a human can be found in two types of texts. The first is a set of mythical-literary texts, and the second is a folklore collection. On the fuzzy sets principle, you can treat them as integral fantasy creativity, which was described in detail by Brian Attebery (Attebery, 1992). However, in the literary sense, the phenomenon of fantasy work will appear only in the 20th century. To this catalog, we should add the literary and also the philosophical heritage of the Enlightenment. In this context, an important aspect is the Enlightenment rationalism that seeks a place for a man outside the Christian doctrine and all associated with its views and images. As a result, the reductionist concept appears again, in which Julian Offray de La Mettrie describes man as a machine (de la Mettrie, 1953).

Unfortunately, the rejection of the religious perspective does not bring any optimistic conclusions (it can be seen in the works of Voltaire since the appearance of the Poem about the extermination of Lisbon), nor clear statements, as we can see in the literary and philosophical quest of Donatien Alphonse François de Sade. However, open questions posed by Enlightenment reflect the ideas of humanism in the circulation of European culture. Within them, man becomes not only the main goal of his own practice but, most importantly, the practice which he evaluates only from the perspective of his own Reason. In this way, he suspends the validity of religious messages and commands. The emergence of Enlightenment concepts in relation to

the role of religion in human life, as well as the role of society and science, creates a horizon of meanings in which both the idea of posthumanism and transhumanism will develop perfectly both in philosophical research and in projects literary.

Literary beginnings of such imaginaries can be sought in the nineteenth-century fantasy prose. We find technological aspects in Jules Verne's novels, in which new technologies — fantastic for those times — appear, such as rockets in Verne, "From Earth to the Moon," or submarines from "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas: A Tour of the Underwater World" (Verne, 2011; 2015). These new technologies pointed not only to new perspectives that opened to man. In combination with the revolutionary element (fighting with colonialism), they also brought utopian projects that had socialist elements inside them — for example, the idea of universal well-being on Earth. However, images related to exceeding the human body's limits are much more explored at that time. Initially, their sources were have been laying in myths or folklore, as is the case of "Dracula" by Bram Stoker (Stoker, 2011) or "Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley (Shelley, 2009). In the first case, we deal with the phenomenon of undead monstrosity, which in this way, however, reveals the perspective of the immortality of the human body. It does not change the fact that although the body of such a man does not die, but is no longer a human body. We have here not only a return to a fairly well-known mythological and folkloric motif but above all the implementation to the modern literature the motive of the transformation of the human body and the consequences of this treatment. This is important because the motifs from Stoker's novel will evolve in culture and popular literature and are going to become the dominant figure over the years. A little differently, the issue of transhumanism can be seen in the novel Shelly. We find here the desire to overcome the limitations of biological death, but also a trying to deprivation the process of creation of a man from the randomness inscribed in it. The entire plot is constructed around the motif of creating by a scientist a better man than nature does. This common creation of science and technology returns to Prometheus's image (inscribed in the subtitle of the novel) and makes attempts to break free from biological determination. Of course, Shelly's poetics brings a slightly different interpretative dominant, which in no way changes the fact that such meanings in this novel are already appearing. The complementation of this type of images, in which a man is torn from the physical and biological conditioning of his own existence, we can also find in the motifs of Celtic folklore quoted by William Butler Yeats, in the story Red Hanrahan, in which functioning a well-known motive of existence beyond time (Yeats, 1978).

These first literary attempts clearly indicate not only the fact of great interest in the issues of enhancement of the human condition both in the social and biological perspective but also the exploratory nature of literary searches that accompanied them. As a result, emerged not only narratives with images of the transformed ("enhancement/ corrected") human but also all variabilities of consequences to these treatments. The exploration of the mythical and folkloristic ideas was associated with the necessity of overcoming the dichotomous nature of the present sacred texts. The consequence of this was a concentration in the literature on the category of tremendous (Otto, 1993). Literary or rather comics searches that will bring the 1920s of the twentieth century will go a little differently. Of course, it is about characters like Batman, Superman, and Spider-Man, to mention the most recognizable ones. Created by Bob Kane, the figure of Batman, who is the protector of Gotham City, involves two elements: the physical fitness of a young man and high technologies, thanks to which his artefacts make him an invincible defender of peace in his own city. There is also a motive of friendly capitalism, thanks to which an extremely rich hero can finance not only research on these fantastic

artefacts, but also produce them. In Superman's case, it seems that we deal with a different scale because the hero comes from outer space, and his actions are also very often cosmic. Superman himself, despite the appearance of a man, has superpowers, thanks to which he can not only fly, stay in the space vacuum but also perform activities which for normal people are unworkable.

The most important in this case is to incorporate all these supernatural possibilities into an organism that looks like a human. The last type of superhero, idealized in the comics of the 20s, is Spider-man. It is a teenager who is stung by a spider on a school trip, as a result of which his body undergoes numerous mutations. In the external appearance, these mutations not be seen. Still, they turn out to be extremely important in the psychological transformation of a teenager who becomes another defender of the endangered city. In all of these cases, there is a very similar scenario: endangered human society, by more or less demonic evil forces and the official security forces that cannot manage it and appearing defender with possibilities to fight, exceeding the limitations of humans being.

In this case, we are dealing with the classic vision of transhumanism. On the one hand, it is reduced to the wishful visualization of a young recipient of pop culture, and on the other hand, it fulfills the ideological function of an over-protector who restores lost social harmony.

From transhumanism point to posthumanism's paradigm

Generally, transhumanism as an ideology and a reflection about the future of human conducted both in the circle of futurological and humanistic consideration is the embodiment of classic Enlightenment liberalism. He is interested only in the individual human being and its perspectives on self-improvement, and hence the fundamental issue is the immortality of humans as the most important postulate. For transhumanism, the new technology has only a positive meaning. This approach is in the best way expressed by the notion of "morphological freedoms" used by Bostrom. Another defining of this trend and movement is "Humanity plus" (Ferrando, 2013: 32). The ideology of transhumanism emerged as a result of progress in the sphere of science and technology, particularly in nanotechnology, medicine, cognitive science, computer technologies, and information. Fabrice Jotterand writes about this in the following way: Transhumanism is a part of scientific endeavors, as well as part of the intellectual and cultural movement that raises questions about the identity of the man and the future of the human species. The only error that transhumanism can make is to be polarized through the terminology of bioconservatism and uncritical acceptance of its own assumptions. Man can not escape from the realities of technological and scientific progress" (Jotterand, 2010: 620).

Trying to outline the transhumanist reflection directions, Fabrice Jotterand points out that one can speak about three main trends. The first — recognizes transhumanism as a beloved child of the Enlightenment, especially when we talk about his worship of Reason. Transhumanism believes in science like the entire thought of Enlightenment, believes that science will allow a man to go beyond the limits of the body and brain. The second focuses on the ideological ambiguities resulting from understanding the term of extension/enhancement of human capabilities. It turns out that this understanding always refers to some "normal," "natural," "authentic" human nature, seen, however, differently by different researchers. Actually, at this stage, the ideas of transhumanism become part of post-human consideration, post-human philosophy. The third line ceased reflection in the frame of classical transhumanism but is part of the post-human discussion about the legitimacy of the human species' essentialist

properties. The conclusions are unambiguous: one should forget about certain separate, constant, biologically conditioned nature of the human species (Jotterand, 2010: 617).

When transhumanists claim that new technologies give rise to design a new man who will free from the limitations of his corporeal shell, they exceed the paradigm of Enlightenment and make from a human being, which becomes immortal.

According to the vision of transhumanists associated with the World Transhumanism Association: “post-human may be completely synthetic (based on artificial intelligence), or be the result of numerous, gradual, biological improvements, what will be ending with the creation of a new post-human race. Some post-humans may even acknowledge that it could be useful to get rid of their bodies and live as information patterns on huge, super-fast computer networks” (Walewska, 2011: 315-316). WTA believes that transhumanism is the spiritual heir of humanism and is therefore often referred to as Humanism Plus. This trend postulates the striving to improve people and the quality of human life with the support of modern technologies (such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, robotics, neuroscience, and their related variations) (Transhumanistic FAQ, 2014).

Of course, the opponents of technological and medical manipulation over the human organism; therefore, consider that, on the contrary, transhumanism is a denial of humanism. They perceive it as a mere pragmatism, trampling on the axiology of religion and the metaphysics of human existence. This is the mere realization of humanity's dreams of immortality using modern technologies, which finally is a betrayal of humanism.

In this view, transhumanism is close to the posthumanist approach, manifested in his anti-anthropological rejection of a substantial understanding of human nature. It is necessary to realize that a man's praised future often in a colorful way broadcast by transhumanism has nothing to do with the scientific premises from which he comes out. Human beings supposedly freed from single physicality and possessing multi-body and possessing the free moving between multiple incarnations is not even an ideology, nor the work of a fantastic effect. It is a pure fantasy beyond the imagination of fantasy and SF authors. However, this does not bother ago to become a field of posthumanism reflection because, in post-human prospects, we have the right to appoint and consider all possible variants and even unimaginable human prospects.

In this context, the main question is about post-human identity — or any transhumanist/posthumanist hybrid in the post- culture. Because, as, for example, says Slavoj Žižek, the identity of a man results from the way in which he is situated in the world, from its ecstatic relations to the objects of this world (Žižek, 2009). Actually, that is what Francisco Ravela emphasized in his work “The Embodied Mind.” Man is not solely the result of the relationship between two strictly defined factors — genes and the environment. It is a rather involved and participates factor, which does not so much refer to its environment but as agent mediates and creates itself world of life (Valera et al., 1991: 81). The paradox here is, as Žižek says, that total self-objectivity coincides partly with its opposite. On the horizon of the “digital revolution” is the vision of the attainment by the human being ability that Kant and other German idealists called “intellectual clarity” (Žižek, 2009: 46-47). Reality is unthinkable without a human being, i.e., without an initial premise, which can be called “resistance” to a certain exterior. There is no ontology without something that stands in opposition to Self/ Consciousness. If there is nothing that resists, then No-Me, No-I, e.i. The reality can not be described. This is what happens with the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, who, without any limitations, is essentially the same as the “external” reality.

In this field, transhumanism moves when glorifies the new technology. At the same time, it is speaking about transferring the human mind to other carriers. However, using these approach transhumanism transcend beyond their own boundaries and cease following Enlightenment reflection, but just become part of posthumanism consideration. After all, the development of science and technology did not reach such a stage that one could state what is being transferred when we speak about the mind (thus whether it is possible at all) and what is obtained at the exit. For example, N. Bostrom talks about uploading the mind (or whatever it is?). Suppose you move a certain identity from some materiality base into another. In that case, you rather move into a world of fiction, fantasy, and fairy tales, because it still has not been settled the problem of what actually is identity and how it is referring to the problem mind-body, etc. Moreover, when one tells that we are transferring some thought patterns, algorithms, logic and etc., it turns out that we are moving in a classic posthumanist terra incognita, in a strictly speculating area. Because we still have not known what we get at the exit and with what we are dealing, for certainly not with this being we have known so far, or what transhumanism says in this context about.

Usually, transhumanism is seen as the opposite pole for posthumanism. Something that looks like a modern “postmodern traditionalism” because, in the field of his commitment and interest, there are still a man and his march towards a better future, and almost immortality. The paradox is that at some point, all imaginable boundaries are crossed, and only one thing is known — appears certain frame for a depiction of somewhat like post-human being. And about this creature, nothing reasonable on the scientific ground can be said, and some theoretical operation can be done only in the sphere of literature and cinema; only in this space one can say something specific about. Then it must be clearly explained that this kind of consideration is no longer transhumanism but just posthumanism. It is clear, thus that if transhumanism claim to be a continuation of traditional humanism (the Enlightenment project — faith in Reason, science and man himself), new radically different conditions for the implementation of this project resulting from the revolution in communication technologies, medicine, and cognitive science show that it is not traditional humanism. It is necessary for these new circumstances, regarding the new existence of “post-human,” to accept a totally new paradigm that is nothing like a traditional understanding of what means being a rational creature nowadays. It is the condition of the lack of permanent attributes of human nature. When a man of transhumanism dissolves, we always enter a circle of post-human reflection. Because this thought is trying to circle the alternative of post-creature because it knows that it will not be as optimistically/romantically as it has been seen by transhumanists.

Posthumanism seems to be a responsible humanistic reflection, which, based on previous research, proposes a new scientific paradigm. This is what, for example, Neil Badmington says (Badmington, 2003). In work “Posthumanism,” in which he analyzes authors who have an indirect or direct influence on the development of ideas related to posthumanism. According to him, they mostly find their pedigree in postmodernism. This is Baudrillard’s concept of virtuality and simulacrum, the structuralism in the edition of M. Foucault and R. Barthes, Marxism by L. Althusser, as well as the postcolonialism of Frantz Fanon (Fanon, 1985). According to Badmington, an important role was played by the theory of Other B. Reading and the theories of multiculturalism, feminism and gender. All these ideas are consistent in criticizing the treatment of humanism as the only true worldview defining the totality of the human population and civilization. Sam Badmington is not so critical and claims that rumours of the death of humanism are premature. Rather, we can not talk about the death of a man as such because humanism has the ability to regenerate and assume (Badmington, 2003: 11).

Above all, posthumanism puts an end to the recent conviction of the uniqueness of man and his sovereignty and thus overcomes traditional humanism, which, it seems, has rested on its laurels. This traditional humanism could be characterized as giving special status to man, assuming that it differs not only quantitatively but qualitatively from all other natural beings. Both posthumanism and transhumanism they cross this traditional kind of humanism (Welsch, 2014: 2). Similarly, Francesca Ferrando says that posthumanism and transhumanism combine a similar critical reference to a human being as a creature with an unchanging nature. However, their roots and perspective look alive differently (Ferrando, 2013: 26). This determines their individuality and scientific rank — posthumanism seems more mature and prudent.

Wolfgang Welsch goes the farthest in his proposal because he is trying to create a philosophical foundation for the post-human movement, i.e., he puts forward the idea of so-called evolutionary anthropology. Both he and posthumanists have rejected the concept of humanism, which would designate an unjustified ideology of pan-humanism. Welsch criticizes and denies the common human nature and the superiority of the human species over others. The latest historical research results and some latest theories, among others, feminist, gender, postcolonial, and species theory show that exist until now paradigms are not justified. According to Welsch, the new posthumanist perspective proposes the following premise: one can not talk about a man but about the different incarnations of rationality, reason, and intelligence (Welsch, 2014).

Generally, it can be said that posthumanism is a reflection about a human being based on the assumption of the multiplicity of human and nonhumans natures because nature in this system is more a culture than a predetermined being. From this point of view, one could say that different cultures and civilizations produce different intelligent creatures. In this context, falls down, for example, J. St. Milla's liberal idea of a universal human nature, which was basics for all emancipation and liberation movements, all political visions of building one just world.

In posthumanism, apart from a real reflection on the nature of man and his future, the dominant thread is the antihumanist rejection of former humanism (as a Eurocentric, etc.). Of course, this does not mean that there is no place here for the transformation of this humanism into something completely different.

Posthumanism does not assume any essentialism. Therefore nothing may say about human nature. It can say that it could be a nodal moment in the new, future world of diverse existence, that human existence will be one of possible existence as a conglomerate of references and interests. In such a vision, for example, a transhumanist concept of Kurzweil's singularity may appear. Therefore vividly, one can see that this genuinely futurological idea of Kurzweil is rather straight from the post-human world and not transhuman future. As says Fernando, posthumanism exceeds the point of view of species domination because, in the spirit of deconstructivism, it demystifies every ontological polarization and no longer uses any fundamental dualistic and bipolar relations (Ferrando, 2013: 29).

Conclusions

The results of our research are as follows.

1. It has been shown that in the culture over the centuries, there have always been threads related to the idea of improving the enhancement of the human condition.

2. The starting point those ideas one can find in the myths of the ancient world, in which characters of heroes and hybrids, to whom important cultural functions were attributed, appeared. Similar phenomena are presented in all practices of modern culture, especially in its popular expressions.
3. It is then shown that speculation in the SF and mythological fantasy texts have a theoretical and futurological reference into the philosophical discussion between posthumanism and transhumanism.

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