

# IN PRAISE OF OBJECTIVISM, OPTIMISM AND UTOPIANISM: A COUNTERPOINT TO SORGNER

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John Danaher\*

## Abstract

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner's *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* is an opinionated and original take on what it means to be a transhumanist. Although I find myself in agreement with a lot of what Sorgner has to say, I nevertheless object to some of the core philosophical underpinnings to his views. In particular, in this article, I will argue that his relativistic, pessimistic, and anti-utopianist stance should be rejected. Instead, transhumanists should embrace objectivism, optimism and utopianism.

## Keywords

Transhumanism, Nietzsche, ethical objectivism, optimism, utopianism

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner's (2022) *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* is a rollicking and opinionated take on contemporary transhumanist thought. Sorgner is an expert guide to the territory, having been central to the *transhumanist movement* (if there can really be said to be a movement) for the past two decades. He is also to be commended for carving out his own distinctive niche within transhumanist thought—a niche that is philosophically sophisticated, grounded in Nietzschean ontology and ethics, and different in its core philosophical commitments to the more typical analytical, Anglo-American strands of transhumanism.

This presents something of a challenge to myself since it is to the latter schools of thought that I belong. Despite this, I find myself in agreement with a lot of what Sorgner has to say. I think his critique of Silicon Valley inspired fantasies—sadly too commonly endorsed in transhumanist circles—hits the mark. I also agree with his claim that no serious transhumanist thinker should speak of *immortality* or the quest for immortality as being a core part of transhumanism. As he puts it, no naturalist can seriously entertain such an idea: the goal is to increase healthy lifespan, not to achieve immortality. More generally, I agree that it is a mistake for transhumanism to associate itself with an impractical and unrealistic faith in the power of technology to

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\* School of Law, NUI Galway, Galway, Ireland.

rescue us from our natural condition. Not only is this a recipe for personal disappointment—what if the longed-for technological *deus ex machina* never arrives?<sup>2</sup>—it also involves epistemically unwarranted leaps of faith concerning the trajectory of technological development.

These points of agreement notwithstanding, I find that I cannot get entirely onboard with Sorgner's version of transhumanism. In particular, I find his claim that transhumanists should embrace nihilism, pessimism and anti-utopianism to be mistaken. On the contrary, I think that transhumanists should embrace ethical objectivism, optimism and utopianism. Or, to be more precise, I think that if transhumanism is to be a compelling worldview or ideology, it must be committed to those things and, contrary to what he claims, Sorgner's version of transhumanism is often, in fact, committed to them. This is the argument I will make in the remainder of this article.

In defending this argument, I will not be defending ethical objectivism, optimism or utopianism per se. I appreciate that some readers might see this as a cop out (a shirking of my argumentative responsibilities). I have two things to say in my defence. First, it would take far too long to provide a defence of these claims and nothing I say on these matters would be particularly original—though I have attempted extended defences of optimism and utopianism in the past, e.g. Danaher (2022) and Danaher (2019). Second, although he has well worked out views on these matters, Sorgner himself does not present extended arguments in favour of nihilism, pessimism and anti-utopianism in *Why Have Always Been Cyborgs*. He veers instead into clarifying what he means by those concepts and explaining why transhumanism, as he sees it, ought to adhere to them. In responding to this, I will attempt to clarify Sorgner's key claims about nihilism, pessimism and anti-utopianism, contrast them with my own understanding of these concepts (grounded in the available philosophical literature), and argue that Sorgner ought to drop his commitment to these ideas.

## **1. Why Transhumanists Should be Ethical Objectivists**

In the opening chapter of *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* Sorgner argues that transhumanists ought to be *alethic* and *ethical nihilists*. What does he mean by these terms? Alethic nihilism, for Sorgner, is a kind of empirical non-cognitivism: the claims we make about the nature of the world and our place within it are merely interpretations of our experience. They are not true or false in any meaningful sense. Why is this? Sorgner seems to derive support for this idea from Nietzschean process ontology: nothing exists in its final form in the present day; everything is in a permanent state of becoming (something else). Consequently, there is no stable metaphysical foundation—at least none accessible to our senses—in which to ground our empirical propositions. All we can offer are competing interpretations, some of which gain ascendancy and win our approval, others which do not.

Ethical nihilism is a slightly different beast. It is the view that ethical claims or propositions—such as “it is wrong to rape, murder or steal” or “negative freedom is good”—are not capable of being true or false. They are just statements, spoken into a void, that, like their empirical brethren, may win our approval at different times,

but are not grounded in some deeper moral reality. Sorgner grasps this form of ethical nihilism with both hands, saying that he is happy to live in a time when liberal values have gained ascendancy, accepting that there is no definitive reason why such values ought to be approved. Ethical claims are then a little like expressions of preference or desire; not deep truths about the normative structure of the world. Still, Sorgner (2022) argues that ethical nihilism, like alethic nihilism, stems from the commitment to process ontology:

Alethic nihilism is an epistemological position, while ethical nihilism is a judgment on values. Both follow from the absence of ontological stability. If a judgment is true, it needs to correspond to the facts. However, if there are no facts, but only continual becoming, then a judgement cannot correspond to anything... in a world of continual becoming, the best we can be confronted with are contingent nodal points. These, however, are important for our own survival. A contingent nodal point is an interpretation. Whenever we make a judgement about the world, the we present interpretations....[this] does not mean that each judgement is false. It merely means that each judgement can be false...It is one interpretation among many others. (p 18)

Although there is a certain logic to this form of nihilism, I don't find it persuasive nor do I find that it provides a sound basis for transhumanism.

Why not? First, it is worth noting that *nihilism* is a polysemous concept, subject to many, not always compatible interpretations (Joyce, 2013). This often leads to confusion in the interpretation of those who profess to be nihilists. To my mind, it is important to distinguish between two kinds of nihilism: practical and metaphysical. Practical nihilism is the view that action or activity is pointless, i.e. we cannot achieve any meaningful or worthwhile through our activities. Some modern philosophers have argued that technology is inculcating within us a form of practical nihilism (Gertz, 2018): we feel powerless in the face of (seemingly) all-consuming and all-powerful technological forces. Like Nietzsche before him, Sorgner is very clearly not a practical nihilist. He thinks there is tremendous self-actualising power in the combination of human agency with modern technology. Sorgner is, however, a relatively profound metaphysical nihilist. Metaphysical nihilism is the view that there is no truth of the matter when it comes to certain kinds of propositions or claims. Metaphysical nihilism can be more or less expansive. An empirical (alethic—to use Sorgner's terminology) nihilist thinks that propositions about the state of the world—“it is raining today,” “everything we see is just matter and energy” and so on—are neither true nor false. They are just interpretations that can be more or less useful. An ethical nihilist thinks that ethical claims—“it is wrong to torture an innocent child,” “pain is bad” and so on—are neither true nor false. An empirical nihilist could, in principle, limit their nihilism to particular subsets of empirical claims, as could an ethical nihilist. Similarly, it is possible to be an ethical nihilist without being an empirical nihilist and vice versa. Sorgner, however, makes no attempt to limit or

constrain his version of nihilism. He embraces both empirical and ethical nihilism without apology or caveat.

There is something bracing and daring in this, but the total embrace of an unconstrained form of nihilism seems problematic to me. For starters, the alethic nihilism that Sorgner professes appears to be self-defeating. As noted in the quoted passage above, Sorgner (2022) claims that it “follows from the absence of ontological stability” (p. 18) or, to put it another way, it is true (or credible) in a world of continual becoming. The problem here is that the claim that world lacks ontological stability and is in a state of continual becoming looks an awful lot like an empirical claim about the nature of the world. If we follow alethic nihilism to the hilt, then that claim is neither true nor false and so cannot be used to justify the further claim that we ought to embrace alethic nihilism. Alternatively, we could accept that the claim that the world is in a state of continual becoming is true, in which case alethic nihilism is no longer justified because we now have an external truth to which our propositions can correspond. We can then simply accept that our claims about the nature of empirical reality are subject to change over time. They can be true or false at particular moments, but they change their truth value in response to changes in the underlying ontological reality—just as it is true that I was wearing a blue jumper yesterday but false today. In other words, if one accepts the process ontology, there is no reason to link it to nihilism, nor to think that it is impossible for propositions to correspond (at least temporarily) to some external reality. Indeed, it seems that in order to embrace process ontology one must be a realist or objectivist, not a nihilist.

The problem I identified in the preceding paragraph is, of course, an old one. As long as there have been nihilists, there have been people criticising them for being self-defeating or self-undermining. But just because the problem is an old one doesn't mean it is not valid. To make nihilism plausible you either have to embrace an extreme form of relativism in which even your arguments that purport to justify nihilism have no truth value and so have no obvious merit over and above objectivist or realist worldviews, or else you try to constrain your nihilist in some way, in which case you end up embracing realism and objectivism about some claims.

This is an even bigger problem when it comes to Sorgner's ethical nihilism. If you ground transhumanism in ethical nihilism then you sap it of its normative and motivational power. Transhumanist principles are compelling if they offer a path to an objectively *better* or *superior* form of existence (they may also be compelling, to some, if they offer a path to an alternative, but not worse, form of existence). Take the proposition “it would be good, all things considered, if we extended healthy lifespan”. This strikes me as a compelling proposition since life gives us opportunities for meaningful and pleasurable experiences. All else being equal, it is better to have more such experiences than fewer. But if the proposition is neither true nor false, and someone claiming that “less healthy lifespan is good” is offering a view that has an equal claim on our motivational powers, then it is hard to see why one should embrace transhumanist principles. To put it another way, it makes sense for transhumanists to follow their credo and want others to follow it on the basis that it represents the best or a better path forward. But transhumanists need to be able to

distinguish true (or truer) ethical judgments from false (or falser) ethical judgments to justify this. It is not enough to just assert opinions or preferences.

Furthermore, Sorgner clearly seems to embrace this need himself. Throughout the book, he reveals himself to be committed to certain apparently objective ethical truths e.g. that accepting axiological pluralism is preferable to authoritarianism, that negative freedom is a good thing, that we ought to build a tolerant society that embraces diversity, not a closed society that enforces conformity. To be fair, Sorgner states these views as mere preferences, suggesting that he is happy to live in a society that seems to accept these preferences, without committing himself to their deeper truth or rectitude. But if there is no deeper truth to them, if we cannot expect to persuade others of their rectitude with logic and reason, what is the point in writing a book like his? Is it all just an intellectual game designed to fill the time before we die? Maybe, but if so, then that's not a form of transhumanism I can embrace, nor is one that I think anyone should embrace. For these reasons, I think transhumanists should reject both alethic and ethical nihilism.

## 2. Why Transhumanists Should be Optimists (Within Reason)

What about optimism and pessimism? Sorgner thinks naturalism justifies a kind of Schopenhauerean pessimism. Schopenhauer was the arch-pessimist. His philosophical position was premised on the idea that humans are driven by an insatiable will. All our lives we desire things: food, sex, success, meaning. Sometimes we satisfy our desires, but as soon as they are satisfied we start to feel empty again and our desires move on to something new. This endless longing for fulfilment is the tragedy of the human condition. In short, for Schopenhauer life was an ongoing but ultimately fruitless search for something that would satisfy the will. In this search, we might achieve pockets of satiation but they would always be short-lived. And then, of course, we die.

Sorgner thinks that this Schopenhauerean view is about right, and entirely consistent with the process ontology he favours. Nothing is ever in its final state; everything is unstable and subject to change. Humans are no different. We are part of this unceasingly changing world. Most of our lives are made up of suffering with occasional pockets of joy:

No matter whether you are rich or poor, you are confronted with continuous suffering. Whatever you do involves the overcoming of obstacles. You are stuck in a traffic jam, in a waiting room, or with your colleagues in a meeting. The moments of pleasure are rare, and usually only last for a short period of time... Most of the time we are struggling, fighting and striving, but the moments of fulfilment are few and do not last long. (Sorgner, 2022, p. 12)

Unlike Schopenhauer, however, Sorgner does not embrace pessimism to the hilt. On the contrary, he informs us that he is a *positive pessimist*. Like many transhumanists, he thinks that the human condition is imperfect, riddled with humiliations of the flesh and sufferings of the soul (using the term *soul* metaphorically), but there is some possibility of overcoming these limitations through the use of technology. Sorgner is

optimistic about the potential for technology to alleviate some of our suffering. This might not reverse the overall negative trend, but it gives us some respite and reason to be hopeful.

Sorgner supports this techno-optimism in a number of ways. Chief among them is his recitation of positive trends in the recent development of human civilisation, such as the reduction in poverty, increase in life expectancy, reduction of childhood mortality, increase in clean water and nutritious food. There is a small cottage industry of books dedicated to highlighting these positive trends, prominent examples include books by Matt Ridley (2010), Steven Pinker (2011; 2018) and Hans Rosling et. al (2018). Each of these positive trends, according to Sorgner, speaks to the important role of technology in making our lives better:

Extreme poverty has decreased, and life expectancy has increased due to the further development and usage of technologies. Overall, this has significantly increased the probability for humans of living a good life, which is a clear reason for holding a positive attitude toward technologies. (Sorgner, 2022, p. 16)

But this techno-optimism is not, in itself, a reason to reject overall pessimism. We are still trapped in a vale of tears, doomed to live lives full of suffering:

The preceding reflections show the line of thought on which a positive attitude concerning technologies can be based. At the same time, you can hold the position that life is full of suffering, which is related to the continual becoming...This is the line of thought which leads to the judgment that transhumanists can be characterised as positive pessimists. (Sorgner, 2022, p. 17)

I am less critical of Sorgner's positive pessimism than I am of his nihilism, but I still think his position leaves something to be desired. In particular, I think it doesn't make much sense to profess a positive outlook or claim to be a techno-optimist unless you think that it is possible to overcome the majority of suffering in life. This is a position I have defended, at greater length, in a recent article on the idea of techno-optimism (Danaher, 2022). In that article, I put forward an *ameliorative* analysis of optimism, in general, and techno-optimism, in particular. A typical view, and the one to which Sorgner appears to subscribe, is that a techno-optimist is anyone who thinks that technology makes things better. But this understanding of techno-optimism makes little sense. Better relative to what? If life is endless suffering before death, and technology just gives us some additional moments of pleasure between raindrops of pain,<sup>1</sup> then how can such a view count as optimistic? In lieu of this, I would argue that optimism should be understood as the view that the good prevails over the bad, i.e. that there is more good stuff than bad stuff, over some relevant time period. Optimism, so understood, can be more or less expansive. You can be an individualistic optimist and think that the good will prevail over the bad for you, individually, but perhaps not for everyone. You can be a humanistic or transhumanistic optimist and hold that the good will prevail over the bad for the

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<sup>1</sup> To paraphrase Kaj Sotala. See the epigraph to Chapter 1 of Danaher (2019).

majority of humans (or posthuman successors). Or you could even be a universalistic optimist and hold that the good will prevail over the bad across the entire universe, for all time.

How does techno-optimism fit into this? Easily enough. I argue that techno-optimists should be understood as those that believe that technology (broadly conceived) plays a key role in either sustaining the prevalence of the good over the bad, or in ensuring that the good does, finally, prevail over the bad. How does this ameliorative analysis of techno-optimism relate back to Sorgner's position? As you might imagine, I would argue that transhumanism makes most sense if it is understood as the worldview that is committed to the idea that technology plays a key role in ensuring that the good prevails over the bad, perhaps by a considerable margin, for humans and their posthuman successors. I don't think it makes much sense for transhumanism to be a form of positive pessimism, committed to the idea that all life is endless suffering, but technology can give us some temporary distraction or reprieve from this suffering.

But that's just my view. Is there any reason to think it is correct? I think there is. For starters, I think there is reason to doubt the Schopenhauerean starting point. I think, on balance, life is pretty good (certainly for reasonably privileged people like me). It is full of exciting opportunities, satisfying relationships, meaningful projects and pleasurable experiences. Certainly there are moments of unpleasantness and, unfortunately, it will come to an end some day, but while we are around I tend to think it is more good than bad. I also believe that modern technologies help to ensure that this is the case. A world with central heating, industrial agriculture, modern supply chains, democratic constitutionalism and rule of law, antibiotics, electricity (and so on), is better than one without. I think my view is also relatively widely shared. Psychological surveys of people, around the world, suggest that most people are happy and satisfied with their lives. Furthermore, even those who seem to suffer great iniquities and losses (e.g. debilitating illnesses) often bounce back and find meaning in their experiences.<sup>2</sup>

The pessimistic response to such empirical data would be to argue that people don't understand how bad things really are and they are deluding themselves into thinking things are better than they are—a phenomenon well known as an optimistic bias or delusion. Certainly, the Schopenhauerean position is that people need guidance from deep philosophical thinkers like himself who can lift the veil from our eyes and enable us to see our existence for what it really is. This is a view echoed by other pessimists in recent years. For example, David Benatar, in his anti-natalist monograph *Better Never to Have Been* (2006), spends a lot of time arguing that our common sense understandings of pleasure and happiness mask the fact that pleasure is something we experience when we overcome our natural predisposition to pain and suffering. But it is not clear to me why these philosophical views about the nature

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<sup>2</sup> To be clear, the empirical data is nuanced. Poorer people and people from less economically developed regions of the world (perhaps most notably sub-Saharan Africa) are less happy and satisfied. Nevertheless, average happiness and satisfaction are higher than most people assume, going up in most countries and inequalities in unhappiness are decreasing within countries. For a review of the empirical data, see Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2017).

of life are more credible than the views of people living lives for themselves. To put it another way, who is the greater authority on whether your life is going well, you or some third party commentator? While some third parties might be incisive and helpful, my general belief is that individuals are the best authorities on how well their own lives are going. If most people are satisfied and most people find meaning and pleasure in life, then why assume that life really is endless suffering.

All that said, I am not a dyed-in-the-wool techno-optimist, nor do I think that all transhumanists should be. I think some forms of techno-optimism are difficult to justify. For instance, the more expansive your version of optimism the more challenges you face in defending it. It is relatively easy to defend individualistic optimism about your own life (provided the evidence backs you up). It is very hard to defend universalistic optimism. Will the good really prevail over the bad in the long run? The second law of thermodynamics suggests that everything is tending towards a state of disorganisation (low energy); environmentalists warn that we are butting up against the carrying capacity limits of the biosphere. This suggests that our current state of relative happiness and abundance might be short-lived. There are, consequently, some reasons for pessimism in the long run. Whether there are any countervailing and outweighing reasons for optimism is hard to say. These are difficult matters to adjudicate, as I point out in my article on techno-optimism (Danaher, 2022). Nevertheless, they are somewhat tangential to my main point here which is simply that I think transhumanism, as a worldview, makes more sense, and is more compelling, if it allies itself to techno-optimism—understood as the view that technology plays a key role in ensuring that the good prevails over the bad—than to Sorgner’s positive pessimism.

### **3. Why Transhumanists Should be Utopians**

Finally, we come to utopianism. Sorgner is strongly opposed to utopian forms of transhumanism. He sees utopias as types of social reform movement that try to create the ideal society. He thinks utopianism is, consequently, a dangerous social ideology that runs the risk of endorsing authoritarianism and instilling conformity in society. He sets out this anti-utopian position at several points in the book. On page 162 he says: “There are a number of transhumanist approaches with strong utopian traces, but there are also others which can be classified as anti-utopian versions of transhumanism. My approach clearly belongs to the latter category” (Sorgner, 2022, p. 162). He follows this up, more emphatically, on page 163 by claiming that utopian transhumanism is a danger to humanity: “I particularly wish to stress...that we are doomed if we actually follow a utopia. I rather hold that the rejection of any kind of ultimate utopia promotes human flourishing” (Sorgner, 2022, p.163).

Why is utopianism so antithetical to human flourishing? Sorgner (2022) explains why at several points but is most clear and direct on page 165:

Utopias are fine, if they are meant as rhetorical devices to hint at certain social and individual challenges. If they are meant literally, and, worse still, if they are understood literally, then utopias can have problematic implications. Fundamentalists can use them to try to install all types of

totalitarian means to bring about desired utopias, which, however, cannot be realised. In these cases, people and the present in general are sacrificed for an impossible future. Unfortunately, there have been too many such social experiments in the history of humanity already, and which have had dramatic consequences. Instead, my anti-utopian transhumanism focuses on and stresses the importance of realistic goals. (p. 165)

There is a lot going on in this passage but, in essence, Sorgner rejects utopian transhumanism on the grounds that utopianists try to: a) impose on others a vision of the ideal society that they might not accept; b) this vision is usually unrealistic or unachievable; c) nevertheless it is used to justify the use of authoritarian means of social control and enforcement; and d) this results in present generations being sacrificed for the future.

In terms of the historical examples of utopias going awry, one doesn't have to read between the lines too much to suppose that Sorgner might be alluding to the 20th Century's experiments in fascism and communism.<sup>3</sup> There are also many examples of failed, smaller scale *intentional* societies that could be used to buttress Sorgner's critical case (Segal, 2012).

In making this case against utopianism, however, I believe that Sorgner assumes too narrow a view of what utopianism is. If one embraces an alternative view of utopianism, one which is deeply rooted in utopian social movements and intellectual history, one can avoid the authoritarian impulse to which Sorgner alludes and end up with a vision of the future of human society that is close to the one that Sorgner appears to endorse.

In his excellent parsing of the history of utopian thought, Christopher Yorke (2016, 2017) argues that there are at least two distinct schools of utopianism: the blueprint school and the horizontal school. The blueprint school thinks that the goal of utopian social thought is to set out a very precise and carefully demarcated vision of what the ideal human society would be (the *blueprint*) and then to reform society so that it matches this vision. Contrariwise, the horizontal school of thought thinks that there is no single vision of the ideal society; rather, the ideal society is one that constantly pushes out toward the horizon of possibility, remaining open and dynamic (this is similar, though not identical to the ideal of *frontierism* or the *frontier spirit*, which is rooted in US intellectual and cultural history).

Sorgner's critique of utopianism is directed against the blueprint school of thought. And his critique is a legitimate one since the blueprint school is one with deep roots in utopian thought. The word *utopia* was famously brought into the English language by Thomas More, in his 1516 book, *Utopia*. This book consists of the fictionalised reminiscences of a visitor to a foreign land with an ideal form of social organisation (roughly, a form of technologically advanced Neo-feudalism). Much of the book is taken up with describing, in detail, the blueprint for this ideal Neo-feudal society. Even though the word originated in that work, visions of ideal

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<sup>3</sup> I won't discuss the matter in depth here but Sorgner's criticism of utopian social movements is very similar to Karl Popper's critique (Popper, 2002). I discuss the latter in Danaher (2019, Chapter 5).

societies have a much deeper pedigree in Western thought. Plato's *Republic* is, in many ways, the classic utopian work of philosophy. In it, Plato, via Socrates, sets out his vision for the just society. The society is rigidly authoritarian, different types of people have specific roles they must fulfil, and there is little room for freedom of thought, poetry, music and the exploration of new possibilities. Many other utopian works follow a similar structure. What's noteworthy about these works is how much attention is paid to mapping the precise contours of social organisation. Having read a number of these works, I have to say I wouldn't like to live in the societies sketched by their authors. They seem stultifying, boring and limited. A testimony to the poverty of human imagination. What's more, I agree with Sorgner insofar as purveyors of these utopias often seem far too willing to sacrifice the wishes and desires of some people for the greater good of building the ideal society. That way madness lies.

So if utopianism were limited to the blueprint school of thought, I would sign myself up to Sorgner's anti-utopianism in a flash. Fortunately, utopianism is not so limited. The horizontal school of thought has a long history too and is, indeed, the form of utopianism embraced by modern thinkers. Classic statements of the view can be found in the work of Oscar Wilde:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias. (Wilde, 1981)

And HG Wells—"The Modern Utopia must not be static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage leading to a long ascent of stages" (Wells 1905/1967, p. 5). The horizontal model does not presume a single, specific blueprint. Rather, it sees utopia as a regulative ideal for societies—something towards which we aim but never quite attain. Ironically, there is a blueprint of sorts embedded in the horizontal model. The blueprint is a society that maintains openness and dynamism, that does not assume that there is some final, ideal, stable state that human civilisation must reach. The goal then, in structuring society, is not to implement a highly regimented blueprint with an authoritarian enforcement system to keep it in place, but, rather, to create an institutional structure that keeps pushing us toward the horizons of possibility.<sup>4</sup> This requires ongoing technological and philosophical progress, diversity, experimentation and creative destruction.

Transhumanists should embrace the horizontal model of utopianism. They should not assume an ideal resting state for humanity or posthumanity. They should maintain openness and dynamism. They should embrace pluralism, freedom and experiments in living. Sorgner himself appears to embrace these values, repeatedly welcoming the fact that he lives at a time when tolerant liberal pluralism is in the (relative) ascendancy. In that case, he too is a horizontal utopianist. As well he should

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<sup>4</sup> A similar model can be found in Robert Nozick's idea of the *metautopia*, roughly, a social structure that allows people to build and join societies that match their own preferences. This is discussed in part 3 of Nozick (1974), and I also use it in my analysis of utopianism—in Danaher (2019, Chapter 7).

be. To echo Oscar Wilde: a map of transhumanism without Utopia would not be worth glancing at.

#### 4. Conclusion

I want to close by reiterating my appreciation for Sorgner's book. To the extent that I have offered criticisms in this article, I do so in a friendly spirit and in the hope that they can set transhumanism on the right track.

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