

SMEAR GEL PAPER FOR A CONTINGENT MARBLE SCULPTURE: A REPLY TO SOME CRITICS

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Abstract

In the article, *Smear Gel Paper for a Contingent Marble Sculpture. A Reply to some Critics* Sorgner answers selected criticisms of his monograph *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* (2022) which were put forward by Russel Blackford, Steven Umbrello, Steve Fuller, Maurizio Balistreri, and John Danaher. The meaning of the term *violence* was central for issues raised by Russel Blackford. Steven Umbrello questions whether Sorgner has sufficiently taken into consideration the ethical turn towards design-embedded norms and values. According to Steve Fuller, Sorgner presents a bioconservative, cishuman transhumanism. There is a difference between replanning the human and enhancing human capacities, according to Maurizio Balistreri. John Danaher confronts Sorgner's weak transhumanism with arguments in favour of a classic version of transhumanism. Each criticism is being dealt with in a separate sub-chapter.

Keywords

Transhumanism, ethics, philosophy, cyborg, posthuman, anthropology

I am extremely grateful to all scholars in this volume for having contributed such immensely perceptive reflections on my monograph *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* (Sorgner, 2022a) and for giving me an opportunity to respond to some points raised concerning my philosophical reflections. The intellectual generosity displayed in this volume, and the good-faith engagement with the most important contemporary issues challenging thinkers today, demonstrate a desire to find appropriate philosophical responses to contemporary issues and not just win arguments for the sake of intellectual sport. It is immensely rewarding to be part of such a reflective and intriguing intellectual exchange.

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1. Violence and Russel Blackford

Russel Blackford is particularly concerned with the way I use the term *violence*. In his view, my reflections derive from a “worryingly broad conception of violence”. I agree with him on this point: I employ a very broad concept of violence. However, this need not have worrying implications, as I do not claim that violent acts must be forbidden. A certain degree of force and strictness, which is a type of violence, might even be necessary for personal flourishing, as such force can be used to prevent a child from inflicting harm on him- or herself. This does not imply that parents are morally justified to inflict direct bodily harm on their children. This is not the case. This example merely confirms that I use the term violence in a broad way. It can be moral to act violently. In other circumstances, it can be immoral to act violently but it should nevertheless be legal to do so. Of course, violence can also be immoral as well as illegal.

Blackford does not share this broad understanding of violence. According to him, “violence is regarded within liberal democratic societies as immoral and intolerable”. I do not wish to argue against the validity of this claim of his. I merely wish to observe that I employ a different concept of violence, and I clearly distinguish violence from the concept of harm. You can treat a person violently without directly harming them. Directly harming a person is often, but not always, morally problematic. However, even the notion of harm is a dependent on one’s culture, which must be interpreted on a case-by-case basis.

I am grateful to Blackford for highlighting my broad use of the term violence, as it gives me an opportunity to clarify further how I employ the term and to examine some of its corresponding nuances. Blackford was understandably concerned with my use of the term violence due to our different associations with these terms. He feared that my reflections can lead to an affirmation of both “call-out culture” and “cancel culture”, “whereby individuals are subjected to public shaming—and to campaigns for other punishments such as censorship of their publications or termination from their employment”. It is correct that I claim that the application of Savulescu’s principle of procreative beneficence implies violence—one reason why I regard it as immoral. However, this does not mean that it should not be taught or that it should be censored. It was merely the deciding reason for me to argue for a liberal understanding of fictive autonomy and against a utilitarian ethics affirming the principle of procreative beneficence.

Firstly, it is crucial to recognize that verbal violence must be clearly distinguished from direct harm done onto another person. Secondly, it is uncertain whether it is possible to clearly state what the limits of free speech are or ought to be. This was not a philosophical issue that I dealt with in this book, and I doubt that a general answer can be given. Thirdly, I wish to add that my understanding of violence has practical implications when it comes to issues like teaching.

As a philosophy professor, I avoid disclosing my philosophical approach. Students can read what I stand for in my published work and writings, but I avoid explicitly sharing my own philosophical views in my teaching. I do so, because I acknowledge that, as a university professor, I am in a position of power concerning my students. If I were to always make a point of divulging my opinions and

arguments, they might, as a consequence, feel illegitimately pressured to revise or adapt their moral judgements or arguments to please me or match my own. I want them to develop their own ethical approaches in my classes, and I do not judge their arguments on the basis of their views, but rather for how they justify moral judgements. When I publish my writings, give presentations, and participate in debates, on the other hand, I affirm my role as a philosopher representing a specific philosophical position, as here, I have the role of a professional philosopher and intellectual, who does not merely present his opinion, but who presents a moral judgement based on a complex philosophical approach and understanding. Physicians, natural scientists, and economists without a philosophical education, on the other hand, merely present opinions when they deal with moral issues. An opinion clearly needs to be distinguished from a moral judgement, which presupposes an intense intellectual engagement with ethical theories. As a philosopher, I have developed the capacity to present moral judgements. It is my role in public as well as in academic debates to perform this role.

I hope it has become clear that my use of the term violence is indeed broad, but that it need not have worrying implications. A violent act can be a moral act, even if it means that harm is directly onto a person. The act simply needs to be morally justified. The passengers, who stopped the *shoe bomber* from setting off his device directly harmed him. It was a violent as well as a harmful act, but it was clearly also a moral one. This example shows that even violent and harmful acts can be moral. To conceptually separate the notions of violence and harm, intellectual reflections on these terms can become more nuanced, which is one reason, why I employ this meaning of violence.

Blackford stresses: “If we tell parents that they acted wrongly in a particular set of circumstances, this is not a violent act—it might be officious, insensitive, unhelpful, or many other things, but it is not an example of acting violently.” I disagree. It is violent, since you make them aware of having done wrong, and there is violence in such a statement. However, this verbal violence does not have to represent a direct harm done onto parents. I hope this provides some further insight into the understanding that a conceptual separation of the concepts harm and violence can lead to a more nuanced philosophical discussion of corresponding intellectual issues.

2. Design-embedded Norms and Values and Steven Umbrello

Blackford is also concerned that I “underestimate the importance of privacy”. As I regularly stress the relevancy of collection of our personal digital data, I do not think it is plausible to argue that I underestimate privacy’s relevance. I was explicit about my misgivings about the abuse of digital data in *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* (Sorgner, 2022a). I am extremely hesitant about sharing my own digital data within the given cultural context. This hesitation is rooted in two worries. Firstly, the currently dominant infrastructure in the Western world is such that the collection of personalized digital data accrues to the owners of big tech companies. There is no existing infrastructure to support the realization of a democratic use of digital data.

This is primary reason for my strong hesitation concerning the sharing of digital data in our current technological context.

I also highlighted explicitly in the monograph that there are enormous dangers associated with handing the collection of personalized digital data and its enforcement over to an EU organization. I have always stressed that in such situations, data should primarily be processed by algorithms, and that human access must be minimized due to increased risks of abuse that ensue from humans' access to such sensitive data. Furthermore, I have stressed the risk posed to democracy, as there is always the possibility that more authoritarian politicians will be elected to positions of power, thus increasing the risk that data are used in the interest of the political leaders rather than in the interest of citizens. I am terribly scared of all these possibilities. However, I continue to regard the option of an EU institution collecting personalized digital data as the best possible as-good-as-it-gets-solution to the challenges we face, as many important insights can be generated by means of this information due to the enormous potential in using personalized digital data.

These remarks are also my reply to Umbrello's argument that I am "entirely insensitive to the *design turn in applied ethics*". He even states the following: "What Sorgner's arguments and positions betray is that he is using an *instrumentalist* understanding of technology where, as the term suggests, technologies are understood as instruments or tools." This is not the case. In the above reflections, I clearly demonstrate the additional dangers that ensue from altered infrastructure. I explicitly stress that technologies are a means, but they should not only be seen as a means, as they also alter who we are (Sorgner, 2022a, pp. 13–14). Design as well as digital structure influence their use. If a personalized collection of digital data is available, then it increases the likelihood of an authoritarian abuse of data. Technologies are a means, but they also have embedded norms and values, as they alter our being in the world. It is a separate issue to grasp how relevant the technologies are and how they need to be considered. In the case of the collection of personalized digital data, I have shown how digital infrastructure implies specific values and norms. Here, the aspect of efficiency is crucial. If all digital traces are, by necessity, collected, then collection is more efficient than if this is not the case. This is also the reason why I do not regard the following statement of Umbrello as a criticism:

Sorgner and the NSCAI have a parallel rationale here; because China does it, then so must we. To be fair, Sorgner does say that we must do so democratically, whatever exactly that means, but at the end of the day his argument presents a distressing mirror to those of the NSCAI.

A vaccination against smallpox works. If they are doing it, so should we. The promotion of this vaccine across the world has led to the eradication of smallpox. The rationale "if they are doing it, we have to do so, too", need not be an implausible one. The value of efficiency gets promoted by means of the technological infrastructure for whose realization I argue. This aspect also leads to an increased risk of an authoritarian abuse of such structures. I highlighted this insight in the cyborg book already and I do so again now to demonstrate that Umbrello's criticism that my

reflections affirm solely an instrumentalist understanding of technology is false. Even though an increased risk of an authoritarian abuse is part of the technological structure, it is not a necessary element of the structure. The fact that values are embedded in a specific design does not mean that this value must always be dominant. Even if there is increased risk of authoritarian abuse, there is the possibility of democratic use, under the appropriate cultural circumstances. This is the insight that I have emphasized when I clarified that technologies are both a means as well as an alteration of who we are. (Sorgner, 2022a, pp. 13–14)

In any case, I share Umbrello's worries about a move towards the collection of personalized digital data. The dangers that attend such developments are enormous, and I agree that "we have reason to proceed with extreme caution". At the same time, I do not see any other practical possibility if we in Europe wish to uphold our quality of life. I cherish both that high quality of life as well as the carefully knit social security net present in Europe. Consequently, I stressed the need to rethink the meaning of digital data.

Some intellectuals claim that for the sake of reducing our environmental impact, we should accept a decrease in our quality of life. I strongly disagree with this stance, as entities that have the capacity to suffer intensely should be morally prioritized over entities that cannot suffer, or that have a lower capacity of suffering. If you have the choice of either saving two human beings as well as a chimpanzee, or one human being, a cockroach and a tree, I regard it as morally appropriate to choose the first option. If you claim plurality has a value in itself and that it should always be promoted, you would have to choose the second option. I regard the second as a morally false choice, as the suffering of the cockroach as well as the tree are negligible in comparison to that of the two human beings and a chimpanzee.

3. Cishuman Transhumanism and Steve Fuller

Fuller identifies my version of transhumanism, which stresses the plausibility of a carbon-based continuation of existence, as a bioconservative approach to transhumanism in contrast to the transhuman approaches to transhumanism which he seems to regard as more in tune with the versions of transhumanism "by the people who revived the movement in the 1990s", who focus on an indefinite flourishing "in some sort of digitally uploaded form", i.e., a silicon-based transhumanism. This is an appropriate summary of what I suggest in the reflections of my cyborg monograph. He is wrong in claiming that I am denying the possibility of humans developing further into silicon-based entities or that silicon-based persons can come into existence due to an algorithmic evolution. I cannot exclude the possibility of such developments taking place sometime in the future. However, it seems scientifically unlikely that these types of evolution will take place within the near future.

Fuller's point is that "Sorgner would do well not to tie his *naturalism* to some static view of modality that is wedded to the current scientific consensus on, say, the long-term prognosis for life in the physical universe". What does this mean? I would do well to ignore current scientific insights as a basis for my philosophical reflections? Upon what else could I base my reflections? He is correct in stressing that radical

scientific paradigm shifts can come about due to new empirical insights, and that it is likely that these will occur in the future too. However, I do not see a basis for guessing what these new insights might be. Trying to predict these new insights is futurology. Science fiction authors, futurologists, as well as clairvoyants may try to describe what the world will be like in one hundred years. However, it is beyond the scope of any scientific enterprise to make such predictions. A transhuman transhumanism that makes predictions concerning the question about what the world will be like in one hundred years has left the realm of what can be classified as a proper scientific endeavor. It is interesting to deal with sci-fi, it can be inspiring, and it can challenge widely shared prejudices, however, by presenting such utopias, one has left the realm of what can be done on a scientific basis.

While arguing for the plausibility of such a utopian version of transhumanism, Fuller also regards my philosophical reflections about data collection as utopian, a worry shared by Umbrello: “While Sorgner is certainly correct to see this goal as relatively non-utopian by transhumanist standards, the administrative sophistication that would be required to pull it off seems incredibly utopian.” Here, it needs to be made explicit what Fuller is arguing. Fuller presents a version of transhumanism in which self-conscious, living, and super-intelligent digital entities come into existence either by means of humans merging with machines or by means of algorithmic evolutionary processes. So far, we do not even have one digital entity to which the concept of life can be meaningfully ascribed. However, he regards my carbonate-based transhumanism, in which I stress the practical need of a European institution to collect personalized data as *incredibly utopian*.

It should be recalled that China already has a political system in which personalized digital data are collected on a political level. Of course, he is right to stress that we are far from establishing a similar digital infrastructure in Europe, both culturally as well as technologically. Still, to refer to such structures as *incredibly utopian* is absurd given that one nation has already managed to realize a comparable technological infrastructure. Of course, I am aware that significant alterations would have to occur for such structures to actually be realized in Europe. However, at the same time it is crucial to keep in mind how fast a totalitarian system can become a liberal democratic one, as it did in Germany less than eighty years ago. Cultural changes can come quickly. One need simply remember the relatively short period passing between the decriminalisation of homosexual acts and the legalization and acceptance of the right of homosexuals to marry, which has happened in just the last sixty years. These examples should make it clear that my suggestions are far from being a utopia. They are based on a vision that consider practical examples in recent history. It is a vision based on empirical insights.

A further comment must be made concerning the term *cishuman*, as Fuller identifies my version of transhumanism with a “bioconservative, *cishuman* approach to transhumanism”. This term does not meaningfully work in analogy to the concepts of cisgender and transgender. A cisgender person self-identifies with the gender attributed at birth. A transgender person does not. If we apply this logic to the concept of *cishuman*, then it follows that a *cishuman* self-identifies with the species to which she was assigned after birth. A transhuman does not. If this is the case, then

it is simply wrong to refer to my philosophical approach to transhumanism as a cishuman one. In my philosophical approach, it is merely stressed that it is more plausible that the further evolution will occur on a carbonate-basis rather than on a silicon-basis. However, it was purposefully left open whether a posthuman will still belong to the human species or already be part of a new species. Both options are possible. Making such strong claims concerning the future belongs to the realm of futurology. However, it would be wrong to hold that I argue that everyone who was born from a human must still belong to the human species. This is what the term cishuman implies. I never made this claim, and I would not do it either, as it is highly implausible. Within the great diversity of my philosophical reflections, I have presented reasons against this claim by stressing that we have always been cyborgs.

We came about due to a genetic mutation that enabled us to develop a human language. After being born, everyone receives upgrades from their parents and their environment. The individual develops a language as an initial upgrade. The education process continues by providing further upgrades. We are entities in permanent becoming and without clear borders. Our mind has come about by means of evolutionary processes. We consist of more non-human cells than of human cells. It is possible that our smartphones or our avatars belong to our personhood. This is a radical re-conceptualization of who we are as embraced by transhumanism. In a traditional humanist understanding, our human nature consists in an immaterial divine spark. Now, we are psychophysiology in permanent becoming without clear borders but with having an evolved as well as an evolving rationality. This has consequences for our moral status. The traditional concept of human dignity is no longer plausible, as it implies that only human beings are worthy of moral respect. Consequently, a new concept of personhood needs to be developed whereby the concept of the person may include smartphones as well as avatars. It is this revised understanding of a moral status which I presented in the final part of the monograph *We Have Always Been Cyborgs*. Hence, Fuller is also wrong when he claims that I fail “to take seriously the emergence of ‘cyborg rights’ movement”. It has been a central aspect of my liberal ethics of fictive autonomy, as I have presented it in *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* (Sorgner, 2022a) as well as in the monograph *Philosophy of Posthuman Art* (Sorgner, 2022b).

4. Replanning the Human and Maurizio Balistreri

Personhood is one philosophical issue, and the concept of the good on which technological modification procedures depend is a separate one. The first concept deals with the philosophical question concerning who ought to be respected. The second issue analyses the concept according to which persons manage to live a good life. When it comes to the issue of which genetic alterations should be allowed, a reflection on the concept of the good life is relevant. Balistreri correctly highlights that according to my philosophical perspective, “there is a radical plurality of the *good* and the individual psychophysiological requirements differ too greatly to allow for any nonformal, universally valid description of the good life”. This is a central issue that distinguishes my perspective significantly from that of many other

transhumanists. Even though Balistreri acknowledges this aspect of my approach, he also criticises me on the same issue, which I find perplexing.

Balistreri's central line of thought is that in the age of space travel there is a need to "to replan the human," as it is this activity together with the technology of geoengineering which can enable human beings to realize space settlements. If this is the case, suddenly issues like realizing a smaller body, less need for water and food, as well as a greater resistance to heat and tropical diseases becomes relevant. From these premises, Balistreri infers the following:

And this opens the door to the possibility of also thinking of the posthuman in ways completely different to (and more original than) how we are used to thinking of and portraying it and, above all—taking Sorgner's reconstruction into account—the transhumanists tend to describe it.

Here, I am getting perplexed, as I am uncertain to which transhumanists he refers. He reiterates this insight in a further passage: "For us, this means that transhumanists are wrong, and it is not right that the only morally acceptable form of human redesign is that which passes for enhancing abilities and dispositions." He seems to distinguish between redesigning or replanning and enhancing, which also comes out in the following phrase: "In both cases, replanning human nature may be morally justified even if it does not enhance human abilities or dispositions."

Balistreri is correct to point out a difference between a transhumanist approach and the one he is suggesting if he identifies transhumanism with a hyper-renaissance ideal like that of a superman on Viagra and a wonderwoman on Botox. There is a clear tension between these transhumanist ideals and the "replanning of humans" vision Balistreri proposes. However, not all transhumanists affirm such rather traditional concepts of the good. He himself highlighted correctly that I argue for the plausibility of a radical plurality of goodness. This also means bodily alterations can be justified that do not imply a faster, higher, further. In a certain cultural context, deafness might be an advantage, and the same applies to the qualities he has in mind when talking about space settlements. My weak version of transhumanism implies the concept of a radical plurality of goodness. Consequently, it would also count as an enhancement if someone has "less need for water and food" due to a biotechnological intervention. This means that my version of transhumanism is fully in tune with Balistreri's reflections concerning the need to replan the human in an age of space settlements. This also implies that his former statement that "this means that transhumanists are wrong" needs to be rephrased or developed further, so that transhumanists in this statement merely refers to those classical transhumanists who identify the valid concept of the good with that of a hyper-humanist ideal. It should be noted, however, that there are other versions of transhumanism, e.g., my own weak transhumanism that make a claim for the plausibility of a radical plurality of the good.

5. Classic Transhumanism and John Danaher

Danaher's interpretation affirms the classic version of transhumanism. He disagrees with my weak transhumanism in many fundamental philosophical respects. Given that my approach differs from classic transhumanism, I prefer to refer to it as the attempt to think in between trans- and critical posthumanism, which is the reason why I also refer to it as metahumanism. Transhumanism is often associated with an Anglo-American philosophical approach based on a utilitarian ethics whereby the philosophical pillars are objectivism, optimism, and utopianism. Danaher's approach indeed meets the intellectual demands of a classical transhumanism. Unfortunately, his approach contains all the challenges that inspired me to present a philosophically refined version of transhumanism, e.g., when it comes to the issue of objectivism.

My reflections take into consideration that there are a great variety of different truths. Hence, I argue for an epistemology of perspectivism whereby all perspectives are philosophical interpretations, and an interpretation is a judgement that can be false, but need not be false. It is important to stress that I am merely concerned with fundamental philosophical judgements here, not with judgements based on induction or empirical observation. This is the reason why the following counterargument of Danaher's does not apply: "it is true that I was wearing a blue jumper yesterday but false today". This statement is not a philosophical judgement, but it is a judgement based on empirical observation. Philosophical judgements have to do with fundamental ontological insights, which, in the Platonic tradition, were explained by means of the theory of forms. Of course, an empirical statement can be true or false. Still, we do not know what this jumper is ontologically. An empirical statement merely describes how something appears to us, and empirical statements can be true or false. The same applies to judgements derived by means of induction that make up the foundations of scientific truths. Scientific truths are such that they usually work. They work on a reliable basis. They are so reliable that I am not scared when I board a plane. Induction has given us scientific insights that enable us to build planes that safely take us from point A to point B on a normal day. That is all that matters. There are empirical truths and there are scientific truths. There are also truths, e.g., that 1 and 1 equals 2 is a prime example for a truth by definition. 1 and 1 equals 2 as this is how the various elements of this statement were defined. All of these truths have nothing to do with philosophical judgements referred to in the above definition of perspectivism, which, according to Danaher, is "self-defeating or self-undermining". This is not the case. This is why I stressed that an interpretation does not mean that the judgement is false, but merely that it can be false. It does not fall into the trap of the Cretan liar's paradox. The definition of perspectivism also applies to itself, as it is also a philosophical judgment, which means that perspectivism, too, is an interpretation, which, however, does not imply that it is false, but merely that it can be false, which also applies to other philosophical theories. Perspectivism might even be more plausible than other epistemologies, as no philosopher in the past 2500 years has managed to present a true philosophical judgement that corresponds to the world. Perspectivism is not a self-defeating epistemology. Following from this, Danaher arrives at the next philosophical challenge concerning perspectivism by referring to the issues of motivation and philosophy as a game:

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.

Humans need some kind of foundation for their actions. This is why philosophers and theologians carefully reflect on these issues. In different times, different norms and values are upheld. In our times, democracy, various kinds of liberalism, and a respect for autonomy are widely shared normative judgments. However, at the same time, many normative relicts of our cultural past are still present and effective in our cultural contexts. This is where the issue becomes difficult, as many humans do not realize that they act upon normative premises whose justifications have long lost their plausibility. We just do so, because these norms have been dominant for a long period of time. By presenting such a case, I guide people towards realizing and understanding these tensions and grasping their reliance on normative judgements whose philosophical grounding has long lost its relevance. Only once one realizes this, is it possible to adapt one’s own concept of the good life and consequently change how one acts. Hence, my work advances a specific position in a war over values, which is the reason why I am so dedicated to presenting ethical insights. Danaher raises another distinct, but related worry:

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?

Although all philosophical judgements might just be interpretations, there is a sober truthfulness on which my philosophical approach is based. All these insights can be justified with reference to both empirical observations and scientific insights. There is no need to invoke immaterial entities or weird concepts like Platonic forms. By abandoning the magic elements of existence, we might enter a more disenchanted world, but it is one that more and more people find convincing. Why? It might simply be the case that a more scientific spirit corresponds to the spirit of our times. In the end, it is the attempt to free ourselves from the great number of universal regulations that the religious and political leaders of the past inflicted upon us to more firmly establish their own power structures and interests. In this way, this understanding of transhumanism is an attempt to live and promote freedom, so that each one of us may live according to his and her own idiosyncratic understanding of what it means to live a good life. It is this goal widely shared. I am happy that I live in an age in which so many people do not wish to be treated paternalistically by religious and political leaders. There is a strong interference between my philosophical reflections and the thinking of all those who are interested in being able to live in accordance with their own idiosyncratic drives, desires and affects. I am glad that there are many people with such inclinations.

I hope that with these reflections I was already able to present some central reasons why both alethic as well as ethical nihilism are wonderful achievements and show that the claim of objectivity is not only implausible but also highly dangerous,

as it demands paternalistic structures, colonialist demands, as well as a dangerously fierce violence against anyone who disagrees with the so-called objective truth. Enemies of open societies use objective truths to justify their personal interests.

Danaher's main objection concerned objectivity. However, he also presents arguments in favour of optimism as well as utopianism. Danaher's central line of thought in favour of optimism is the following: "If most people are satisfied and most people find meaning and pleasure in life, then why assume that life really is endless suffering". From this he infers the following: "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".

As we can see from the above comments, Danaher refers to what most people claim as a basis for his argument in favor of optimism. If the central issue is what most people subscribe to, then it follows that we need to find an empirical basis for finding out what most people subscribe to. There are about 450 million Buddhists in the world, about 2,5 billion Christians, and about 1,2 billion Hindus. The fundamental aspect concerning the human condition within Buddhism is dukkha, which basically means suffering. Life is suffering, and as long as you live, this is our fundamental human condition. The same claim is made in the Vedanta, which is a classic text for Hindus. Christianity, too, is rooted in the understanding that all humans have a cross to bear, just as Jesus Christ carried it before his crucifixion. Salvation and a fulfilled life can only be realized in the afterlife and not in the fleeting moments of our immanent, earthly existence. These observations alone should be sufficient to provide a glimpse into widely shared human self-understandings. The fundamental *conditio humana* is that of suffering, and most religions have demonstrated ways of dealing with this suffering, either by providing a meaning for our suffering, or for giving us a hope that there will be a better life without suffering in the afterlife. It might be a myth among a few intellectuals that "most people are satisfied and most people find meaning and pleasure in life". If we think about the ways the world religions have described our human condition, the situation seems to be different.

However, I wish to also highlight that I argue in favor of a positive pessimism, which also stresses that we can make life more bearable, we can find ways of dealing with our practical challenges, and we can reduce the risk and intensity of suffering. This is the reason why I have decided to embrace transhumanism. By means of the various technologies, it is possible to generate some positivity, and increase the likelihood of personal flourishing. Consequently, I strongly reject Danaher's techno-optimism.

The final issue Danaher raises is that of utopianism which unfortunately is a widely shared attitude within transhumanism. However, I am uncertain whether he actually argues for a utopia or whether he is not closer to my suggestion of as-good-as-it-gets-solutions than he himself wishes to acknowledge. Danaher is clearly aware of some of my central reasons for rejecting utopias, as he explicitly highlights the following: "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". However, he also

stresses that there are other examples which disprove the point I am making. Thereby, he does not become overtly explicit, which makes it difficult to respond to his claims in any detail. Thereby, he refers regularly to a horizontal modal “which 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.” I am uncertain which social structure exactly he has in mind. However, it does not seem to correspond to something that I would call utopia, i.e., a world-wide social arrangement by means of which the happiness of all people can be realized, so that all the different means for bringing about this final state are justified. Danaher acknowledges that if one realized what he affirms, one would “end up with a vision of the future of human society that is close to the one that Sorgner appears to endorse”. In contrast to him, I merely would not refer to a selection of regulative ideals as a utopia.

6. Conclusion

I am extremely grateful to the editors for having put together such an amazing special issue dedicated to the book *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* (Sorgner, 2022a), and I am extremely happy and grateful to all the contributors who have engaged so intensely with many of the reflections in the book and for presenting their responses in such a friendly and sympathetic manner. I hope that by means of my responses, I have managed to further clarify some challenging intellectual issues, contribute to the elevation of the complexity of academic exchanges on transhumanism, and that this debate on transhumanist reflections on a great variety of philosophical, anthropological, and ethical challenges becomes increasingly relevant for scholars. Unfortunately, for a long time, many intellectuals and scholars have disregarded transhumanism and not considered it a philosophical approach worthy of academic engagement. I hope the great variety of critical discussions in this special issue has proven this attitude mistaken. I am very much looking forward to receiving further responses to the reflections presented here.

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