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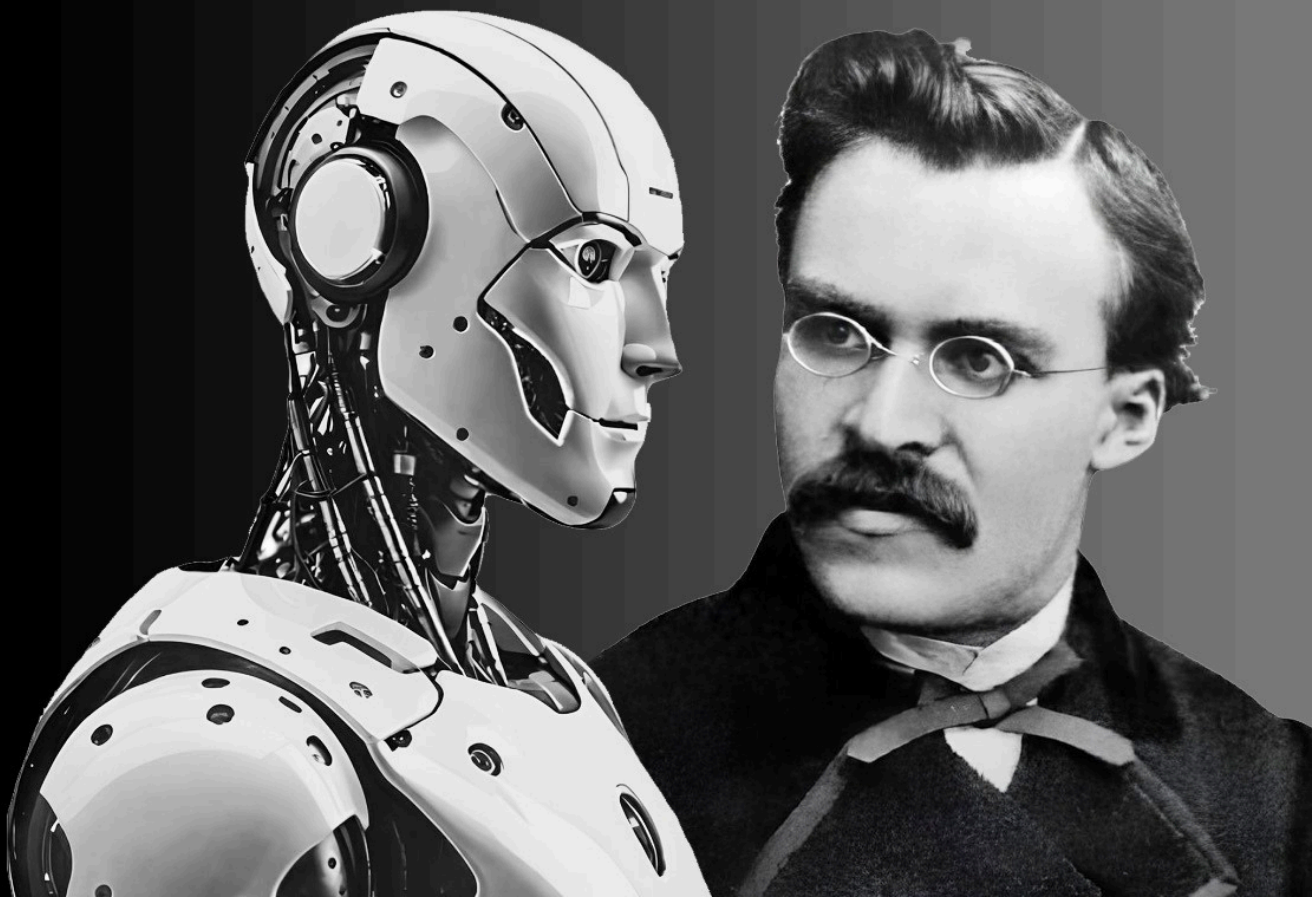
NIETZSCHE, CRITICAL POSTHUMANISM, AND TRANSHUMANISM

Edited by
Aura Elena Schussler

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Aura Elena Schussler

In the rich landscape of challenges raised by the posthuman paradigm shift—crossed by new emerging technologies, environmental issues, and cultural, political, societal, and existential complexities—Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy provides a fertile foundation for exploring and critically inquiring into the intricacy of the present. This essay collection, *Nietzsche, Critical Posthumanism, and Transhumanism,* represents an incursion into Nietzsche's philosophical ideas by revealing the multifaceted influence of his legacy on the various posthuman schools of thought, including critical, speculative, existential, and philosophical posthumanism, and classic, and Euro-transhumanism. Nietzsche's legacy paved the way for postmodern philosophy through its radical critique of humanism and metaphysical tradition, universally valid values, and paternalism, by offering a multiperspectival approach regarding existence in the process of permanent becoming. His philosophy, which influenced the diverse schools of thought associated with the posthuman, provides a compelling framework to examine the ongoing transformation of the human condition in the context of technological evolution and philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic changes. In this context, the posthuman paradigm shift, which challenges anthropocentrism and the Fourth Industrial Revolution agendas, offers new perspectives for reinterpreting and reintegrating Nietzsche's philosophical thinking in the paradigm of contemporary discourses and concerns.

This collection originates from the International Conference on "Nietzsche, Critical Posthumanism, Transhumanism, and Metahumanism," held on June 28–29, 2024, at the Department of Philosophy, Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. It features 14 carefully selected articles that adopt an open and critical stance on the subject, encouraging readers to reflect on the tensions and alignments between Nietzsche's philosophy and posthuman thought. Within this framework, the contributions from 14 scholars and intellectuals present fresh insights into how Nietzsche's ideas have influenced posthuman discourses, shaped new directions in thinking, and impacted the understanding of the posthuman condition. The volume is organized into three distinct sections: Part I, "Nietzsche, Technology, and Posthuman Aesthetics"; Part II, "Nietzsche, Sorgner, and Transhumanism"; and Part III, "Nietzsche, Euro-transhumanism, and Critical Posthumanism."

Part I critically examines paternalistic and normative perspectives on concepts such as the good life, technology, art, and aesthetics. It approaches these topics through a non-dualistic, non-utilitarian and non-paternalistic lens, grounded in Nietzsche's ontology of permanent becoming, and a refined reinterpretation of his philosophy of power, will to power ontology, eternal recurrence, and aesthetic philosophy. It opens with Stefan Lorenz

Sorgner's article "Nietzsche, Dukkha, and Technology—Apology of a Refined Hedonism," which offers a non-utilitarian, non-Buddhist, and non-Nietzschean perspective on suffering as a response to the concept of Dukkha. Sorgner introduces the concept of "refined posthuman hedonism," grounded in the three pillars of *grandezza* (greatness), *raffinatezza* (refinement), and *fiduzia* (trust), as a framework for discovering a meaningful life. Suffering, a fundamental challenge of human existence, is often addressed within the realms of metaphysical beliefs, religious doctrines, ontological dualism, and utilitarian ethics. Transhumanist thinkers frequently turn to technology as a tool for mitigating suffering, advocating for classical or negative utilitarian ethics. However, Sorgner's Euro-transhumanist approach diverges from these traditions and approaches. Rejecting the concept of *naïve hedonism*, he proposes embracing suffering through a reinterpretation of Nietzschean principles such as *Amor fati*, power, and the eternal recurrence. His perspective remains non-utopian and avoids universal applicability, suggesting that suffering should be managed individually, in alignment with one's unique psychophysiological needs and demands. To support this view, Sorgner emphasizes the importance of political systems that should encourage an open perspective of interpretations of a good life, enabling individuals to adopt lifestyles that resonate with their specific needs. In Euro-transhumanist terms, he identifies six lifestyles i.e. "biotypes"—Berlin-style, Turin-style, Milan-style, Rome-style, Florence-style, and Naples-style—each characterized by distinct drives, emotions, and aspirations in their approach to suffering. As biotypes, these styles are permanently in the continuous process of becoming as "non-essentialist contingent nodal points" that occurs "during intense constructive interference" (Sorgner, 2022/2024, p. 390). Thus, art, aesthetics, philosophy, will to power, self-discipline, and self-mastery are key aspects in these lifestyles, resting on the unique psychophysiological ground of each person that dares to embrace an idiosyncratic existence. However, among these, Sorgner champions the Naples-style biotype, which lies at the heart of his refined posthuman hedonism. This lifestyle focuses on enduring pain and suffering as a path to achieving profound, meaningful moments in life, emphasizing the importance of forming trustworthy, meaningful relationships with like-minded individuals who share a commitment to greatness and refinement.

Remaining in the same realm of art, Yunus Tuncel's article "Artistic Power, Plasticity, and the Dionysian in Nietzsche and Posthuman Aesthetics" offers an in-depth analysis of the creative power that occupies a central position in Nietzsche's philosophy of power as well as in posthuman art. Nietzsche's philosophy of power is not reduced to or identical to his will to power ontology. Power is a rhizomatic and transversal entanglement of the feeling of power (artistic power, plastic power, political power, and so on) that shaped human culture, history, and existence. Nietzsche's aesthetic philosophy emphasizes Dionysian ideals of ecstatic union with nature and symbolic expression, as well as plasticity, which reflects flexibility and cultural development. The convergence of the Dionysian with surrealist and abstract art is exemplified by Yunus through Kandinsky and Magritte's post-mimetic works that closely align with posthuman art. The author describes Nietzsche's concept of plasticity as a vital force for shaping human existence. It is the power that creates a dynamic balance between the historical, the unhistorical, and the suprahistorical, as it opens the myriads of processes regarding human self-transformation and cultural renewal. Moreover, these plastic forces act as a critical stance for the historical excess, and advocate for a balance of memory, forgetting, and creativity. The article brings a critical analysis regarding the reductive tendency in understanding the concept of power. It brings a new

interpretation regarding Nietzsche's will to power ontology and that of the notion of plastic power rooted in creative endeavors. It emphasizes the importance of weaving power with artistic expression, aligning with posthuman aesthetics. This is an important step considering that posthuman art and aesthetics rest on a fluid entanglement of technological advancements and inclusive power dynamics. In this paradigm, Nietzsche's insights bring innovative approaches to contemporary challenges, opening new perspectives of interpretation.

Aura Elena Schussler's article entitled "An Approach to Patricia Piccinini's Posthuman Artworks Through the Lens of a Weak Nietzscheanism" offers a reinterpretation of Nietzsche's aesthetic philosophy and the concept of the overhuman in the realm of Patricia Piccinini's posthuman artworks. She approaches this analysis from a weak Nietzschean perspective and interpretation to emphasize the process of permanent becoming in the posthuman paradigm shift, where technology, art, and life are interwoven into a new unity of fluid, non-anthropocentric, and non-dualistic relationships. Central to this analysis is the Apollonian–Dionysian twist, which shapes Piccinini's more-than-human world, challenging ontological boundaries between human and animal, as well as natural and artificial realms. This world is populated by "animal-pomorphic" creatures, hybrids, monsters, and chimeras, celebrating the posthuman osmosis of the natural–artificial flow. These entities embody a symbiotic co-existence and co-evolution that align with the posthuman convergence. Schussler highlights Piccinini's notable works—such as "Sphinx" (2012), "The Field" (2018), "The Balance" (2019), and the *Between the Shadow and the Soul* exhibition (2020)—as representations of this posthuman aesthetic journey. Here, Apollonian and Dionysian forces reunite to breathe new dimensions into life through the unpredictable manifestation of aesthetic forces. Piccinini's installations "Alone With The Gods" (2016) and "Still Life with Stem Cells" (2002) explore the concept of the overhuman in the context of contemporary biotechnological advancements. In this context, the overhuman is reimagined within the framework of posthuman creativity, which Piccinini's installations associate with the challenges posed by emerging technologies. This creative force is expressed through the complex interconnections and entanglements at the heart of posthuman convergence, unveiling the limitless potential embedded in life itself.

A Nietzschean analysis of posthuman art through the lens of a non-dualist and non-anthropocentric paradigm is also approached by Philipp Wolf in "Nietzsche's Aesthetic Physiology of Art and Posthumanism." Wolf's interpretation of Nietzsche's aesthetic physiology finds its convergence with posthuman art and aesthetics in many ways. First, he links this perspective to Nietzsche's idea of "power-quanta"—which feeds Nietzsche's will to power ontology—by emphasizing the dynamic and relational forces that shape the intricate entanglement between both organic and inorganic. Second, he sees artistic power and life as the generative forces that shape existence. In this paradigm, art and life are inseparable. Both mirror the process of permanent becoming that rests on autopoietic processes. In this respect, Nietzsche's aesthetic physiology deconstructs binary oppositions and speciesist essentialisms, an aspect that stands at the core of both critical posthumanism as well as metahumanism. His non-dualist ontology opens a fluid and rhizomatic world grounded on relational ontologies. At the core of these transformations, art becomes the medium where these relational dynamics of existence dissolve the human-centric discourses as well as the ego-centered consciousness. What results is a dynamic, co-constructed, and co-inhabited world where the "Dionysian ecstasy" brings a fluid and open life experience. This is an aesthetic experience where the human and the non-human, the natural and the

cultural, merge into the sensory-affective flows of life. This is a state that rests on mimetic and empathetic relationships opened up by the posthuman convergence, where different beings and the material world intertwine in a continuous flux of changes.

Part II explores a Nietzschean approach to transhumanism, presenting different perspectives on this topic. The authors draw their arguments from both classic transhumanist philosophies, such as those advocated by thinkers such as Nick Bostrom, and Euro-transhumanist perspectives, championed by Stefan Sorgner. It is a rich chapter that presents thought-provoking insights on various topics, such as human enhancement, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) technologies, emerging technologies, human dignity and autonomy. It provides a fresh analysis on present and future technologies and their impact on human evolution.

Nicolás Rojas-Cortés, in his article entitled "Overcoming the Transhuman Condition: is it Possible to Philosophically Enhance Transhumanism?" brings a critical analysis of the classic transhumanist agenda particularly as it is supported by Nick Bostrom's theory of longtermism. The author's criticism is oriented towards classic transhumanism, which, in his opinion, is philosophically incoherent in its' seeking of an indefinite life extension, or immortality. His criticism is directed towards technological determinism—central to classic transhumanism, which relies heavily on physicalist and functionalist frameworks in areas such as cryogenics and mind-uploading—as well as towards the utopian vision of what constitutes a good life. In this paradigm, the problem of capitalist realism becomes relevant for the author. Adopting Mark Fisher's perspective on this topic, the author warns that this philosophical incoherence of classic transhumanist agendas could lead to new challenges at both individual and societal levels. As a response to this concern, Rojas-Cortés advocates for a Euro-transhumanist approach supported by Sorgner. Sorgner's approach is rooted in a Nietzschean and continental philosophy, rejecting the utopian ideals of classic transhumanism. It argues for a coherence between philosophical presuppositions and practical goals, alongside a democratic use of technology. In this framework, Rojas-Cortés supports the idea that transhumanism should consider relying on ethical and philosophical groundings to align its assumptions with its aspirations.

A further analysis of Nietzsche's philosophical potential influence on transhumanism is explored by Marius Markuckas in his paper "Sorgner vs. Bostrom, or Nietzsche's Philosophical Relevance to Transhumanism." Markuckas takes a critical stance regarding both transhumanist philosophers Nick Bostrom and Stefan Sorgner on this topic. The author argues that both philosophers are simultaneously mistaken and correct in their interpretations regarding Nietzsche's contribution to transhumanism. In his analysis, Markuckas revisits the philosophical debate initiated by Bostrom and Sorgner on this topic, wherein Bostrom argues that there is poor evidence of Nietzsche's philosophical influence on transhumanist philosophy, in contrast to Sorgner's position that supports the idea that there are structural analogies between Nietzsche's thoughts and transhumanism. Central to Markuckas's criticism is the concept of the "Übermensch." His arguments emphasize that, contrary to the transhumanist agenda that relies on scientific and technological advancements, Nietzsche's Übermensch is linked to existential and creative growth rooted in the process of permanent becoming, a position that aligns with Sorgner's vision as well. This also marks a key point of contrast between Bostrom's classic transhumanist philosophy—which tends toward a utopian stance regarding scientific and technological progress within a longtermist framework—and Sorgner's Euro-transhumanism, which is grounded in a non-utopian ontology of permanent becoming. However, both approaches

are relevant to building a coherent understanding of transhumanism and its philosophical foundations.

According to Nick Bostrom, transhumanism draws its philosophical groundings from the Enlightenment tradition, emphasizing human autonomy, rationality, and progress as key elements for achieving a good life in the current paradigm of technological advancements. This perspective is critically examined by Juan Ignacio Jaña Villarroel in his article "The Case for Enhancement and the Enlightenment: Foucault, Sorgner, and Transhumanism." Jaña Villarroel analyzes the philosophical tensions and convergences between Enlightenment ideals and classic transhumanist objectives regarding human enhancement. In this paradigm, the author reexamines the Kantian categorical imperative and arguments connected to dignity that, according to Kant, rest on rational autonomy and the capacity for self-governance. Jaña Villarroel identifies these ideas in classic transhumanism as well. For instance, Bostrom and Savulescu argue that enhancing human autonomy and cognitive abilities through biotechnological means could, in turn, elevate human dignity. In response to this perspective, the author draws into discussion Foucault's genealogical critique and power relations philosophy, alongside Sorgner's Euro-transhumanism, to propose a more nuanced approach towards enhancement. In doing so, he extends his approach with a Nietzschean interpretation of transhumanism. Within this framework, Sorgner's concept of "fictive autonomy" became relevant, even if the author argues that this concept of fictive autonomy does not fully break away from the Kantian perspective, even though it adopts a more nuanced approach. However, his Euro-transhumanist analysis brings new challenges to classic transhumanism's ethical and philosophical foundations regarding human enhancement, dignity, and autonomy.

Frédéric Balmont's article "Our Nietzschean Free Riders" offers a fresh perspective on the philosophical tensions among Nietzsche's philosophy, transhumanism, Nietzschean anti-transhumanists, and transhumanists who embrace Nietzsche (Sorgner). Balmont's critique illuminates these complexities by targeting both supporters and opponents of both Nietzsche and transhumanism, including Arnaud Sorosina and Jean-Michel Besnier. His goal is to show how both Sorosina (a fervent Nietzschean) and Besnier fail in their attempt to oppose transhumanism on philosophical and metaphysical grounds. Balmont takes issue with Sorosina's perceived narrow view of transhumanism, criticizing his reductionist approach that frames it as mere techno-optimism driven by hedonism and the pursuit of unlimited life extension. In contrast, Besnier's critique can be seen as less extreme, as he acknowledges the potential benefits of advanced medical technologies proposed by transhumanist agendas. However, Balmont emphasizes Besnier's observation linking transhumanism to nihilism and technological alienation, arguing that transhumanism's reliance on technological advancements risks eroding human symbolic depth. With these directions in mind, Balmont seeks a pragmatic approach to these philosophical tensions. He advises transhumanists who dismiss Nietzsche to allow Nietzscheans to contribute to and enhance the field of transhumanism. Furthermore, he believes that Nietzscheans, while criticizing transhumanist agendas and ideologies, do not stay away from adopting transhumanist advancements selectively, earning the label of "free riders." In addition, Balmont cautions transhumanists who admire Nietzsche to exercise greater care when placing Nietzsche's philosophy at the forefront of transhumanism.

In his article entitled "Unveiling Infinity: AI Simulations and Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence," Damian Mingle analyzes the convergence between Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of "eternal recurrence," VR, and AI simulation technologies that could mimic

eternal recurrence. He tries to integrate the Nietzschean eternal recurrence into current discussions and practical research regarding VR and AI simulation technologies. According to Mingle, Nietzsche's concept may find its relevance in current debates regarding human identity, free will, and autonomy, as well as the experience of time and space in VR. By exploring these intriguing debates, he identifies many philosophical, ethical, practical, and existential concerns. One of these philosophical concerns refers to the simulation of this eternal recurrence in VR. Moreover, Mingle's exploration considers the risks, benefits, and ethical issues of using these AI technologies in different domains. He takes as examples AI simulations in ecological modeling, education, urban planning, and therapeutic practices. For instance, AI-driven VR therapy for PTSD may help many persons in such situations to overcome their traumatic experiences. This approach implies not only Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence but also psychological concerns. That's why Mingle advocates for an interdisciplinary integration of cognitive science, philosophical, ethical, and psychological insights regarding VR and AI-driven simulations. However, he underscores the crucial role of philosophers in offering fresh perspectives on human existence within the context of technological advancement.

Part III delves into the interplay between Nietzsche's philosophy, Euro-transhumanism, and critical posthumanism. It provides innovative perspectives on topics that connect Nietzsche's legacy to areas such as education, ecology, agency, subjectivity, creativity, AI, and the posthuman condition. The authors aim to reintroduce and adapt Nietzsche's ideas within contemporary debates on the digital revolution, environmental challenges, posthuman life, and the evolving role of AI in contemporary digital culture and human existence.

In her article "Becoming More Than Who You Are: Euro-transhumanism, Nietzsche, and Education in the Age of Digitization and Automation," Tamara Kamatović examines the convergence of Euro-transhumanism and Nietzsche's concept of "Bildung" within the context of the digital revolution and its impact on education. Kamatović criticizes traditional education rooted in Enlightenment ideals. She proposes rather a flexible and dynamic understanding of education in its purpose, nature, and processes. Moreover, she raises the ethical concerns that result from education digitization, encouraging an appropriate balance between traditional teaching techniques and technological tools. In this paradigm, she integrates Euro-transhumanism's perspectives on self-transformation and the ethical development of new educational techniques that advocate for a feasible integration of emerging technologies into educational practices. Her approach relies on Nietzsche's idea of self-discipline (as Bildung), which prioritizes individual growth and self-refinement. In this context, the concepts of *otium* (as the cultivation of fine tastes through self-discipline) and *leisure* (as hedonist relaxation), in a contemporary context, become relevant. The author proposes a balanced recalibration of these to support and enhance educational objectives. In this context, Euro-transhumanism, which closely aligns with Nietzsche's vision of self-driven learning and self-overcoming, offers a compelling framework for reimagining education in the digital age—that empowers individuals to shape their growth while embracing the transformative possibilities of technology.

The Anthropocene era presents numerous challenges at both the human and planetary levels. Andrei Nutas's paper entitled "Euro-transhumanism and the Ecological Übermensch" analyzes the philosophical and practical connections between Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch, Euro-transhumanism, technology, and environmental ethics. The article seeks to propose an open and symbiotic co-evolution and co-existence among

humanity, nature, culture, and technology. Nutas presents contrasting perspectives between classic transhumanism and Euro-transhumanism concerning Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch, the environment, and technological advancements. While classic transhumanism supports an individualistic approach to technological progress and human enhancement within the framework of the Übermensch, Euro-transhumanism is rooted in a non-individualistic interpretation of the concept. In this context, the author introduces the idea of the "ecological Übermensch" within the Euro-transhumanist paradigm to highlight the interconnection between humans and nature, prioritizing ecological embeddedness and social and ecological responsibility. Nutas proposes a new environmental ethic centered on the notion of the ecological Übermensch, which advocates for sustainable technologies that unite humanity and the planet, fostering ecocentric values to challenge existing anthropocentric biases. This approach seeks to align human flourishing with both technological innovation and planetary health, emphasizing an open relationality grounded in a redefined "ecological self" that extends individuality to encompass interconnectedness with the natural world. Within this framework, the reintegration of traditional indigenous values related to human psychological well-being and planetary health paves the way for a dynamic ecopsychology rooted in nature-based therapies. The article emphasizes the Euro-transhumanist life-affirming philosophy that reinterprets Nietzsche's philosophy to promote a sustainable, inclusive, and open relationality in a more-than-human world.

In the following article entitled "Nietzschean Hyperagents," David Roden presents his speculative posthumanism philosophy applied to Stefan Sorgner's Nietzschean transhumanism and Gilles Deleuze's reinterpretation of Nietzsche's philosophical ideas. Roden's philosophical project is to develop a "posthumanist ethics informed by an immanent process ontology." The author brings a critical analysis to classic transhumanist philosophy that advocates for human enhancement in an anthropocentric framework through the application of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science. In this paradigm, Roden relies on an immanent process ontology theory that rejects transhumanism's human-centric perspective. By introducing the concept of "unbounded speculative posthumanism," the author questions both human subjectivity and agency in the posthuman transition. "Subtractive xenophilia," according to him, may be a new possibility for the posthuman condition, as it rests on what he calls "biomorphs"—a concept that opens the fluidity and multiplicity of posthuman realities that may go beyond conventional understandings of embodiment and subjectivity. Furthermore, the core discussion involves the transition from "plastic" human agents to "hyperagents"—new entities that will have the possibility of self-modification. However, due to the lack of a stable ontology, folk-psychological capacities, fixed forms, and maybe rationality, these hypothetical entities will also short-circuit traditional notions of identity and agency, opening new possibilities for understanding and speculating on the open-ended posthuman future.

Next, Sifatun Noor follows a critical approach regarding a philosophical convergence of Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch and AI, in the article "Locating the Connection Between Nietzsche's Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence through the Case Study of Black Mirror." The research examines the challenges AI poses to human identity, autonomy, and self-overcoming, using two episodes of the TV series *Black Mirror*, namely "Be Right Back" and "White Christmas," as case studies. The author presents philosophical and ethical arguments to demonstrate how AI challenges Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch by

short-circuiting human uniqueness and agency. This occurs through the creation of technological dependencies that conflict with Nietzsche's ideals of the will to power, creativity, and life-affirming thought encapsulated in *Amor fati*. The author's ethical concerns resulting from the analysis of the two episodes of *Black Mirror* rest on the moral implications of using AI technologies to replicate human consciousness. Such scenarios that appear in both "Be Right Back" and "White Christmas" reveal the ontological and existential limitations of such technologies in fostering human growth and self-overcoming. Furthermore, reducing human consciousness to functionalist and instrumentalist interpretations, as depicted in the episodes, challenges human agency and autonomy, which, according to Noor, demands deeper philosophical and ethical reflection to avoid reducing life and existence to a meaningless, mechanical, and superficial framework.

Nietzsche's frequent use of aphorism in his writings has earned him the label of a "poet-philosopher." Antonis Sarris, in "Nietzsche's Aphoristic Discourse as a Posthuman Enunciation," brings a new insight on this topic. He ties Nietzsche's aphoristic writing to posthumanist and transhumanist discourses. According to Saris, Nietzsche's philosophy opened up a paradigm shift at the core of language and the human condition that finds its grounding in the posthuman enunciation. Sarris's analysis focuses on Nietzsche's writings that contain aphorisms—a particular type of writing and expressing of philosophical ideas that relies on concise and fragmented statements. This approach blends literature and philosophy, creating a method that is both systematic and multiperspectival in interpretation. It bridges linear argumentation with metaphorical expression, influencing the development of postmodern philosophy and literature. Additionally, Nietzsche's aphoristic writing critiques traditional philosophical methods and forms. According to Sarris, Nietzsche's aphorisms also encapsulate his concept of "eternal recurrence," emphasizing the interplay of repetition and difference. Moreover, the author brings a critical analysis of Nietzsche's aphoristic style and contemporary digital culture that embodies tweets and memes. In this framework, the tension between AI and aphorisms reveals the porosity and fluidity of the posthuman paradigm shift.

The editor and contributors aim for this book to be a significant addition to the ongoing discourses and debates surrounding Nietzsche's relevance to the posthuman paradigm shift. This volume serves as a valuable resource, exploring topics such as Nietzsche's impact on classic and Euro-transhumanism, critical posthumanism, ethical considerations of technological enhancement, posthuman aesthetics and education, reimagined posthuman hedonism, robots and AI simulations, and the critique of anthropocentrism in ecological contexts. It is intended to engage scholars, students, and readers interested in exploring humanity's future through the lenses of Nietzschean and posthuman philosophy.

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PART I.

Nietzsche, Technology, and Posthuman Aesthetics

NIETZSCHE, DUKKHA, AND TECHNOLOGY—APOLOGY OF A REFINED HEDONISM

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner

Abstract

Dukkha is an appropriate description of our human condition. The central philosophical issue remains: How should we respond to the challenge of Dukkha concerning the question of how to live a good life? Given an ontology of permanent becoming, concepts of the good life are contingent nodal points. What needs to be done, is to find, create, or develop a concept which resonates with one's own core drives. In this paper, I distinguish between six different ways of dealing with Dukkha, favoring one of them for myself.

Keywords

Hedonism, transhumanism, Nietzsche, Dukkha, technology.

Introduction

Automation radically changes our lifeworld. This has been the case historically, and it is plausible to anticipate analogous processes in the future with radical cultural implications. Transhumanism reflects on such processes and affirms technological modifications, as it posits that the likelihood of persons improving their qualities of life by means of technological modifications will be raised. There is reason to hope for similar future outcomes based on the past. Of course, this does not mean that all modifications improve the qualities of our lives. However, without technological modifications, quality of life would not improve.

Technological modifications can also lead to the automation of certain processes. One such case, which stands out, is the automation of elevators. Up until the 1970s, elevator girls and lift boys were standard. It was considered dangerous to operate an elevator without them. Even today, children below the age of twelve are forbidden from operating an elevator unaccompanied for security reasons. Yet the fact that it was once standard practice for elevator girls and lift boys to accompany passengers in the elevator for security reasons has been forgotten. Elevator girls and lift boys are no longer there, as automated elevators have become sufficiently safe ("Boy lift operator," 2019, May 23). We forget how different it was to take an elevator fifty years ago. Over the same amount of time, legal attitudes towards same sex relationships have also changed significantly. Fifty years ago, they were widely regarded as criminal.

The same is true of self-driving cars. Here, the act of driving is automated. For many, it is hard to imagine a future with no human drivers. However, our attitude towards elevator girls and lift boys has changed completely. There is evidence already that the presence of

self-driving cars is correlated with fewer fatalities. If this continues, insurance rates for human drivers will increase. Insurance rates will either be raised to a prohibitive level, or human driving will be made illegal due to high risk. The same occurred with smoking, incidentally. If an activity is considered too risky for third parties, political systems intervene to regulate the challenges.

The same holds for professionalization, in addition to automation. Paintings on cave walls have been replaced with typing. We can also expect similar developments in the field of human reproduction. Under the tradition of natural law, sexuality and reproduction were once correlated with each other. With the introduction of the condom, birth control pills, IUDs, in vitro fertilization, and surrogate motherhood, the process of reproduction has become professionalized. Artificial wombs and bioprinting will result in further technological developments in line with former technological innovations. If IVF, PGS, and artificial wombs enable us to reliably bring about healthier, longer living offspring, then reproduction will be professionalized in the same way that cave paintings have been replaced with laptops. Traditional technologies will be altered and replaced by more professional and efficient ones.

Professionalizing reproduction is a particularly striking development, as it is so closely connected with the phenomenon of life. Life can be identified with a metabolism, self-movement as well as reproduction. However, how reproduction occurred has changed significantly during the past 3,5 billion years. Cell division was once dominant in reproduction. Eventually, a form of sexual reproduction was developed in which egg producers and sperm producers met and thus generated offspring. One should note that some fish can produce both sperm and eggs at different times, and they manage to switch back and forth throughout their lives (Fuentes, 2023). Some lizards are able to reproduce asexually. Hence, the egg-sperm-binary does not necessarily correlate with a simple-minded male-female-sex-binary. Reproduction is much more complex. Technology further increases reproductive diversity. It is already possible to produce children with the eggs and sperm from three biological parents (Gallagher, 2023). It has already become possible to generate offspring from two male mice (Hunt, 2023). If a certain procedure can reliably produce the best possible outcome, other means will vanish. We can refer to this as the professionalization of reproduction. In the same way, as we no longer have elevator girls and lift boys due to a process of professionalization, it can be expected that the same will eventually hold also for reproductive acts. Hence, the meaning of sexuality and reproduction will change. Reproduction will be technologically professionalized. Sexuality is then more a source of pleasure. Both issues are fundamentally connected to what it means to be alive. Hence, conceptual changes must also occur on a basic level.

To be alive is fascinating and began around circa 3,5 billion years ago on earth (Mulvaney, 2024). How it happened, we do not know. It was most likely the result of a complex interaction, between heat, water, and a stroke of lightning close to a volcano which made molecules arrange such that living entities came into being. Being alive implies that an entity moves by itself. Movement implies the need to overcome obstacles, implies desiring, and implies suffering.

It has widely been recognized that suffering is a fundamental condition of life. Buddhists refer to it as *Dukkha*. Hinduists and Christians, too, stress the relevance of continuous suffering on earth. Different religions and philosophers have presented different responses to the challenge of suffering. However, Dukkha is the fundamental condition we all need to face. I want something, I desire something, and I long for something, and consequently I suffer, as I do not have what I want, need to overcome obstacles to get what I want, and

I will not run out of wants while being alive. Even some Buddhists acknowledge this when stressing that the best humans can reach in this life is a peri-nirvana, but never a nirvana, as humans possess an ego which wants, desires, and strives, which causes us to continuously suffer. The central challenge is how to face the issue of suffering.

Pain, Suffering, Dukkha

To talk about suffering is even more complex than it appears at first sight. Is there a difference between pain and suffering? Can there be non-conscious suffering? Can an entity suffer without being conscious? A fetus shows signs of being in pain, however, consciousness is widely seen as an after-birth phenomena which goes along with a sense of wakefulness, being awake, and open eyes. What is the relevance of distinguishing between conscious, self-conscious, and possibly even super-self-conscious suffering? Can there be different kinds of suffering and what is their meaning? The emotional state of fear of a lion is a type of emotional suffering. The emotional state of anxiety without knowing exactly what one is afraid of is a different state of emotional suffering. A paper cut causes bodily suffering. Being humiliated by getting treated in an undignified way is a different source of pain, which might be better described by cognitive pain as it is rooted in a specific way of thinking rather than in an intense state of bodily suffering. Is suffering something that can be empirically analyzed, i.e. by means of a technological device? Is it possible to compare the intensity of cognitive, emotional, and bodily suffering? What about the suffering of human beings who cannot feel pain, even when they place their fingers on flame? If suffering is the central challenge, would it be in our interest to develop this gene mutation so that we, too, become incapable of feeling bodily pain? Why do so few people desire this? If there some kind of relevance to being able to experience pain? Can the intensity of someone's capacity to suffer be compared to the capacities of suffering of others? How is it possible to compare the intensity of the suffering of a shark with a strong sense of smell with the intensity of suffering of a human being? Suffering and pain are extremely complex philosophical challenges. Just clarifying the concepts is not so easy. Is it possible for an embodied AI to suffer even if it has no artificial consciousness? Is suffering dependent on a certain complexity of a brain and the presence of a nervous system? Whole brain death is widely accepted as a valid criterion for death, as it is assumed that it correlates with an irreversible loss of consciousness. If consciousness is irreversibly lost, a human being cannot ever be in pain again. Are a certain brain structure and a nervous system necessary for being capable of experiencing suffering? Does that mean that it is meaningless to talk about suffering, if an animal does not have a brain of a certain size and complexity? All these questions are extremely challenging and relevant for many ethical, moral, and legal issues. They are all related to our fundamental state of suffering, of Dukkha which represents the fundamental challenge with which we are concerned.

Responses to Dukkha

Traditional binary ontologies shared one specific response to suffering in this world. This world is suffering, the other world, the immaterial realm, the afterworld can be full of bliss, if you do what is right. Binary understandings of humanism have affirmed the hope for bliss in a world after this one. However, after Spinoza, Darwin, and Nietzsche, it is implausible to believe in an afterworld, and alternative responses to the challenge of continuous suffering have been suggested. Hardly any serious philosopher has endorsed an approach built on naïve, a base hedonism. A moderate Epicurean account, on the other hand, has

been more widely shared. The starting point for both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were reflections on the acceptance of life as suffering, of Dukkha (Gödde, 2003). However, their responses differed significantly from each other. Schopenhauer recommends a denial of the will, whereas Nietzsche stressed the relevance of affirming to strive as well as an affirmation of all suffering. None of these suggestions corresponds to my own perspective on this issue. Hence, I will be reflecting on an alternative response to the challenge of suffering, which is a non-utilitarian, non-Buddhist, and non-Nietzschean response to Dukkha and which can be referred to as a refined posthuman hedonism. However, I do not regard it as the only valid response to the question of the good life. As I have stressed, I affirm that no non-formal account of the good is plausible, as there is a great diversity of concepts of the good that corresponds to our longings, desires, and drives. In the following reflections, I will present different lifestyles that can be seen as paradigmatic responses to the challenge of Dukkha. Maybe, each of us should realize their own needs, desires, and affects, and try to live in accordance with their demands. The following lifestyle paradigms might be helpful when reflecting on possible life world decisions for one's own life. My own preference is a refined posthuman hedonism. However, the psychophysiological demands of human beings differ significantly, so different groups of humans might have different lifestyle demands. In the following survey, I identify each lifestyle with a specific city representing the specific lifestyle.

Berlin-Style

Berlin is the capital of base hedonism, the temple of Dionysus. Whether you go to Kit Kat Club or to Berghain, it is all about immersion in immediate hedonistic gratification. Herein, you can follow and live in accordance with your immediate drives to enjoy the most intense sensual pleasures. Sex, Drugs, and Techno music. It is about public sex, intoxication, and living in the moment. No philosopher has properly affirmed the Berlin-lifestyle. Aristippus and the young Foucault have lived or embraced elements of base hedonism, however, it is more closely connected to a rock'n'roll lifestyle. Live fast, die young, and join the club 27. I want to get my kicks right here, right now. Who knows what will happen tomorrow? William Blake's collection of aphorisms entitled *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* summarizes central judgements representative of the Berlin-style: "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom", "Exuberance is Beauty", and "You never know what is enough until you know what is more than enough" (Blake, 1906, pp. 13, 19, 17). Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain, Brian Jones as well as Amy Winehouse lived in accordance with these insights and became members of the club 27. Even though, base-hedonism is particularly characteristic for rock stars, there are also some poets, like Georg Trakl, or painters, like Auguste Macke and Jean-Michel Basquiat, who are club members, and attempted to live life to the fullest. Excess, exuberance, and testing limits are the central characteristic features of the Berlin-lifestyle.

It is beautiful. It is exciting. It is intriguing. Many of the artists of the club 27 have been so creative that they managed to realize a distinctive aesthetics responsible for a paradigm-shift in their respective artistic fields. Many have become pop icons. However, this lifestyle also has its limitations, as one can see from club 27. If you permanently live on the edge, trying whatever drug is offered to you, this will have consequences for your health. You will become ill, gain weight, and face the permanent risk of dying from an overdose of heroin. Our psychophysiological constitutions are not made for the condition of permanent excess. If you plan to live beyond the age of 27, it is not advisable to live in the manner of the

Berlin-style, even though it is particularly tempting, especially during one's adolescence. The sensuality, eroticism, and attractiveness are impossible to deny. There is something intensely exciting about lacking concern for tomorrow and living life in the most intense way every day. High jinks as daily lifestyle choice. Yet, the club 27 already has many members. Though it should be noted that Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are still alive. The appropriateness of this lifestyle might depend on your bodily makeup. However, the likelihood of contracting a deadly disease or your body breaking down due to the stress of a drug-induced state is extremely high. Even if you do not join the club, you will likely die a premature death. This is one of the decisive arguments against embracing the Berlin-style.

Turin-Style

With the Turin lifestyle, we are turning to a philosophically more widely shared approached. It is most closely connected with Nietzsche's last human being, which he expects as a dominant lifestyle after the death of God (Safronov, 2022, pp. 355-368). Human beings who live in accordance with the Turin-lifestyle do not try to achieve anything special. They follow their daily tasks, duties, and orders. After having done their 9 to 5 jobs, they can enjoy a beer while watching television in the evening and go to a football game during the weekend. By working your regular job, you can maintain a family, go out with your friends, and have some intense pleasures during your two-week vacation on Mallorca in a four-star hotel. On vacation, you may enjoy a bottle of Sangria and be carefree, as you have worked hard throughout the year, and you deserve a bit of fun some and then. A little bit of moderate excess during one's vacation is fully justified. It can also unfold itself by means of a brief fling with a colleague, spending lots of money on perfume, cosmetic surgeries, and clothes as well as related issues.

You will not create anything special, do not have any significant worries, and live a healthy life, as being healthy is important to you. For some, being healthy simply means to feel good and not to be in pain. For others, it is important to not have any bodily dysfunctionalities. In any case, the Turin-lifestyle makes it possible to enjoy a quiet and healthy life without any significant worries. You follow the demands of the one, have a job, a family, and friends, and do not have to worry too much for the future, as you live in a political system with a well-developed social insurance system. Public education is free, and the public health insurance covers all significant diseases and comes along with your citizenship. In the event that you lose your job, you will receive unemployment benefits for a while, and even if things go terribly wrong the social security which the government provides enables you a decent standard of life, and an excellent health insurance.

The maximum of excess you allow yourself occurs during your vacation. Maybe you meet a prostitute in order to break free from the monotony of your daily life. You may also have a one-night affair with a stranger in order to escape from your regular everyday existence. However, most of the time you do your job, support your family, and spend a bit of time with your friends in a soccer club, or in a shopping mall.

The Turin-style is characteristic of Nietzsche's last human being. However, it also bears some traces of am Epicurean hedonism, or a common-sense account of the good life. There is nothing entirely problematic with this lifestyle, besides you not having any time to dedicate yourself to any of your own special interests. You are like a slave. A slave is someone's property. You are a worker, who gets paid a little for being able to survive, and for being able to sustain your family, and have some fun with your friends. This is it. You neither

have the time nor the means for living luxurious pleasures except for a two-week vacation during which you can grant yourself the luxury for the masses.

Milan-Style

Milan is the city of money. Upcoming disciplined businesspeople work hard to improve their financial standing. They get up early, go jogging or to the gym, have a clearly worked-out diet, and try to take control over all the aspects of their lives. Thereby, they often adopt a stoic attitude in order to bear the suffering, which needs to be endured. It is the attitude of getting rid of suffering which is characteristic of the Milano-style.

There are different ethical theories associated with this goal. Negative utilitarianism focusses on minimizing suffering (Pearce, 2015). This ethics is particularly relevant for political challenges. A Stoic ethics is concerned with developing virtues such that suffering can be endured best ("Stoicism," 2024). It is a virtue ethical response to the challenge of suffering. A Schopenhauerian ethical position seeks to get rid of suffering by means of overcoming the desiring ego (Brock, 2015). The ethics of the good life was inspired by the Buddhist take on Dukkha. The desiring ego is responsible for suffering. By getting rid of the desiring ego, it is possible to also overcome Dukkha. However, while one is alive, there is always an ego. Hence, it might be impossible to completely get rid of suffering in this way. A temporary relief from suffering can be achieved through aesthetic contemplation according to Schopenhauer, as that makes it possible to free oneself from one's desiring ego and to enter more fundamental levels of existence. By means of instrumental music, it might be possible to become one with the will itself. By means of the other arts, one can at least reach the realm of platonic forms.

However, is this the best way of dealing with suffering? According to Nietzsche it is a life denying attitude. In addition to suffering, you also free yourself from pleasures. To get rid of suffering and still retain capacity to enjoy the great variety of pleasures in life does not seem to be a realistic option. So far, at least, no one has provided a convincing argument which demonstrates that this option is realistic, too.

I understand that life can be unbearable sometime, which renders the Milano-style as plausible. Cicero was devastated by the premature death of his beloved daughter. (Cicero, 2022). Elements of a Stoic ethics which are part of his ethical approach enabled him to deal with such terrible challenges. According to the Stoic virtue ethics, possessing virtues is necessary as well as sufficient for living a good life. If you possess one virtue, you necessarily possess all of them, and you are a moral saint.

If faced with the death of loved ones, one's own mortality, suffering, diseases, failure, humiliation, poverty, war, as well as famine, the challenge of suffering can become so immense and overwhelming that everything else becomes irrelevant. Then, various elements of a Milano-style might be meaningful. If this is not the case, then it seems life-denying. We all face failures, diseases, and the loss of loved ones. Trying to get rid of suffering is one approach for dealing with these challenges. However, embracing suffering and re-interpreting it so that different goals can be achieved, or a different meaning can be given to the suffering are alternative approaches for bearing the pain, Nietzsche argues (Kain, 2007). I agree. By getting rid of suffering, you also get rid of the possibility of experiencing pleasures. However, do not these intense emotional moments represent the most meaningful elements of life? However, which emotional moments should we aim for? What are the most meaningful moments that we can experience? Is there a hierarchy of special goals that we should strive for? Nietzsche's will to power ontology of becoming implies

certain suggestions. They can be distinguished in a naïve Nietzscheanism, and an elaborate Nietzscheanism represented by the Rome- and the Florence-style respectively.

Rome-Style

A naïve understanding of Nietzsche identifies his will to power ontology with the understanding that all humans strive for political superiority. Such a reading cannot be justified by Nietzsche's text, at least on the subject of the highest feeling of power (Sorgner, 2007). However, his understanding of power also implies that power is perspectival. Hence, it depends on the criterion of the interpreting entity which criterion of power gets applied. Nietzsche has his criterion of what counts as the highest feeling of power. However, this is not shared by most others. A person who participates in a caber tossing competition might identify this capacity with a high feeling of power. Caber tossing, on the other hand, is not an activity that is recognized in most parts of the world.

In the Vatican, power might be identified with a religious hierarchy with the pope as the central representative of God on earth possessing the highest power. If the pope makes a judgement ex-cathedra, then it is universally valid ("What does," n.d.). Catholic dogma declares the pope to be infallible. This means that if a catholic does not share the infallibility of the pope's judgement, then this is a reason for excluding the person from the catholic community. However, it needs to be noted that the infallibility of the pope only concerns the pope as a public person not the pope as a private person, i.e. only if the pope makes an ex-cathedra judgement, then it becomes a universally valid judgement. The pope both has political power in the Vatican as well as religious power concerning the catholic community. With the Vatican being within the borders of the city of Rome, the center of catholic power can be identified with the city of Rome. There are 1,4 billion Catholics in the world which is about 18% of the world's overall population.

However, Rome cannot only be identified with an important center of religious power, but also with a relevant center of political power, as Italy is in the top ten of the largest economies in the world. If you wish to be close to the political leader who are responsible for making educational, economical as well as infrastructural decisions, it is advisable to be in Rome. Both political as well as religious power relate to dirty businesses. You need to overcome morally problematic obstacles to establish yourself in the circles of religious as well as political power. However, if you manage to reach such a position of power, then many others depend on you. It might even be the case that your decision leads to the deaths of a hundred thousand humans, e.g. if you decide to enter into war with another country.

Power corrupts. This is at least a common phenomenon. Any kind of power implies the possibility of abusing this position for your own interests. The logic of striving for religious and political power is that by gaining such a position, it is intrinsically valuable for you. Feeling your own situatedness above others provides you with an intrinsically valuable emotion. It is this emotional state that allows you to invest your life with meaning. Undoubtedly, it is the case that power plays a central motivating factor when it comes to human motivations. However, is it the only central factor, and are political and religious powers related to states which Nietzsche identifies with the highest feeling power?

Florence-Style

Nietzsche stresses the central relevance of the feeling of power, and that the criterium for power depends upon perspectival interpretations (Leiter, 1992). Hence, decisive power criteria differ depending on the respective perspective (Hillard, 2002). However, Nietzsche

stresses that the highest feeling of power can be realized by interpreting the world of becoming as a world of stable being, which then becomes culturally dominant so that it changes human perspectives for centuries (Sorgner, 2010). Nietzsche only reaches his personal goal if his interpretation of the world becomes widely accepted over many centuries, in the same way as Plato's interpretation of the world of becoming as a world of being has become dominant in significant parts of the world over millennia, as Nietzsche identifies Christianity with Platonism for the people. This is the highest power one can reach according to Nietzsche, as changing philosophical and religious perspectives of human beings determines their acts.

This task can be achieved by means of philosophical as well as artistic activities. By interpreting the world of becoming as a world of being, and by successfully advertising it, people's acts can be altered, as acts depend upon one's foundational understanding of the world. I referred to this response to the challenge of suffering as Florence style—as Florence has been as cultural, artistic, as well as philosophical center for many centuries. Here, artists, philosophers, as well as intellectuals retreat to dedicate themselves to their intellectual, artistic, as well as philosophical creation by means of which philosophical perspectives can be altered. Thus, successful cultural creators manage to experience the feeling of intellectual power, the highest kind of power according to Nietzsche.

You need to work hard on yourself, be extremely disciplined, have realized an enormous amount of control over your cognitive, artistic, and intellectual capacities to bring about such cultural creations. It is an extremely tough, demanding, and disciplined lifestyle which goes along with the realization of impressive cultural capacities. Such self-control goes along with the affirmation of pain. Self-discipline, self-control, and being reclusive and solitary are painful states and activities, which are justified by realizing the achievement of power, which is the central driving force according to Nietzsche. Hence, the Florence style affirms pain. Pain is embraced to realize intellectual, philosophical, as well as artistic power, and capacities. The reward is the state of feeling an intellectual superiority, which is the highest kind of feeling possible according to Nietzsche. By affirming pain, and aiming for power, you can justify the pain and gain intellectual philosophical power, according to Nietzsche. Achieving a moment of enormous philosophical power can justify an entire existence. Yet, to reach this goal, many obstacles must be overcome. Hence, great health is needed (Gemes, 2021). It is important to recognize this insight. Nietzsche recognized the relevancy of health both concerning the last human being as well as for the overhuman. Health is important for both (Aydin, 2017). However, the definition of health can differ. The last human beings embrace a different concept of health than the overhumans (Huddleston, 2017).

Nietzsche was rather critical of health being a praise-worthy goal, as he identifies it with the lifestyle of the last human being, or the Turin-style. Cultural creators, however, do need what he refers to as great health. Great health does not imply the absence of disease, but the capacity to overcome illnesses again and again and again. Resilience is required, as well as strength, and the capacity to deal with obstacles. All these capacities can be identified with Nietzsche's concept of great health. However, it is not an intrinsically valuable goal, as the fundamental human drive is the will to power, and the highest kind of power gets identified with the feeling of intellectual power when the world of becoming is interpreted as and identified with a world of being, and this understanding is efficiently communicated to a wider public. Thus, if one's own interpretation dominates the acts of others, it is possible to experience the highest feeling of power. It should be noted that for Nietzsche, it is the feeling of power, which matter intrinsically, and not the pleasure which goes along with it, and this is the issue where some further reflections seem to be needed from my

perspective. Power is relevant as a means. However, what really matters in life are exuberant states of joyful fulfilments.

Naples-Style

There are many elements in Nietzsche's reflections that I agree with. However, the ultimate justification of existence seems to lack a decisive moment. Is it really the feeling of that power we strive for? Is experiencing yourself as superior to others a sufficient condition for finding contentedness and meaning? Is power an intrinsic goal, or is it instrumentally relevant? Uniqueness, having evolved capacities, putting efforts into disciplining yourself, and being able to control your body, your mind, your thinking are aspects of power. Possessing all these traits are amazingly relevant without doubt. However, are they sufficient for experiencing moments of utter bliss, ecstasy and fulfilment?

I do not think this is the case. I agree that the most stable capacities, the most lasting, and the most impactful capacities are our intellectual, philosophical and artistic capacities. Nietzsche is correct in this respect. Doing art and philosophy is identical with living a posthuman life of leisure. However, something is missing. Moments of utterly overflowing joy are states of intense pleasure. Here, the circle between the various lifestyles closes itself. Yes, I want to get my kicks right here right now, but the demands that go along with base hedonism are not appealing at all. Base hedonism is self-destructive. Hence, a different kind of hedonism is needed, not a state with little pleasures some and then, but a lifestyle with ecstatic intensities. These intensities apply both to the feeling uniqueness with respect to one's capacities, but also with respect for the amazingly special states of overflowing pleasures that are realized.

A refined posthuman hedonism agrees with the utmost ecstatic states of living in accordance with your idiosyncratic special needs. Your special needs that lie beyond the borders of the one, of normality, of our everyday existence. However, they cannot be achieved easily by going to Kit Kat or the Berghain. They demand certain powers, uniquenesses, and capacities as necessary prerequisites, *Powers* are a means for special moments that justify Dukkha. These moment of utterly overflowing bliss must not be identified with a naïve hedonism that undermines health. These utmost moments of fulfilment demand powerful people and the possibility of being with other powerful people with whom it is possible to agree to experience these special moments together. A companionship of strongly resonating others is needed. Constructive interferences with others with whom correlating special needs are shared. Thus, it is possible to live beyond the boundaries of the normal. A certain discreet reclusiveness might be needed as the one would never be able to relate, understand, and accept these drives, affects, and longings. Maybe some events need to happen behind closed doors.

Raffinatezza, *grandezza* e *fiducia* are three prerequisites for experiencing the most intriguing, intense, and refined moments of exquisite pleasure-pains. It is important to highlight not only greatness and refinement, but trust is utterly fundamental, too. Without trust, you are solitary. However, trust demands a long-standing foundation. It needs be clear that your close companions are trustworthy besides embodying greatness and refinement. It is extremely rare that all these demands come together. Once all these conditions are given it is possible to openly let go, and live in accordance with one's most special, idiosyncratic and extreme drives, affects, and longings. Extreme kinds of uniqueness lead to intense types of unity.

Power is important. Nietzsche is correct in this respect, but to be able to justify your existence and all the pain, which are a necessary constituent of your existence, it is central to experiencing moments of utterly ecstatic bliss by living beyond the borders of what the one demands. These moments usually demand refined and strong others with whom you are connected in a strong bond of lasting trust. This trust is essential for freely opening up and for revealing your own idiosyncratic special needs. If the relationship with these others consists in constructive interferences, you can openly live all your intensely special drives and experience overflowing moments of utter fulfilment. Thus, it is possible to justify the Dukkha (Sorgner, 2022).

This is what I understand as a refined version of hedonism, which is fundamentally different from base versions of hedonism which are representative of the Berlin-style. The aristocratic Naples-style stands for a refined hedonism. Being close to Mount Vesuvius, you are constantly confronted with the possibility of dying. Still, you are dedicated to your grandezza, develop a sense of raffinatezza, and embody a strong version of fiducia. This lifestyle goes along with a lot of suffering. So be it. However, you strive for and might manage to experience moments of utterly overflowing bliss. These moments justify all the pain, you need to face, endure, and go through on a daily basis.

Conclusion

In this paper, I dealt with how to respond to the central human challenge of suffering. Dukkha is the basic condition in which we exist. This is widely being shared. It also represents a central challenge for transhumanism. However, how should we respond to it? This has been the central philosophical as well as religious challenge over millennia. I have been concerned with various lifestyles that each represent possible responses to the issue of suffering and critically reflect upon the various suggestions. It is not the case that I can and do claim that any lifestyle is ultimately superior to any one of the other possibilities. Maybe, different psychophysiologies demand different lifestyles. Hence, it is important that a political system is structured in a way that a great diversity of different lifestyles is possible. However, given my own experience, philosophical reflections, and intellectual engagements, I embrace the aristocratic Naples-style. By being able to experience a moment of utter bliss, an entire existence can be justified, as I regard the great year of Heraclitus and Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence as a plausible meaning of life (Sorgner, 2022). By experiencing one moment of utter fulfilment, your entire existence is justified, as you are aware that this special moment will return again and again and again just as you have experienced it before. You will have to endure and go through an enormous amount of pain and challenges. However, you will be able to meet your loved ones again and again and again in the very same situation you have dealt with them before. Most importantly, the awareness of having lived a moment of utter fulfilment. If you experienced it, your entire existence is justified, as you will live this moment again and again and again. The very same moment… All you need is to be able to experience such an utterly fulfilling moment. Grandezza, raffinatezza, and fiduzia are necessary prerequisites for experiencing such a unique bond, moment, and entanglement. Such moments are incredibly rare. Yet, such moments are worth all the Dukkha. Goethe's Faust was correct:

> Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen:
> Verweile doch! du bist so schön!
> Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,

Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn!
Dann mag die Todtenglocke schallen,
Dann bist du deines Dienstes frey,
Die Uhr mag stehn, der Zeiger fallen,
Es sey die Zeit für mich vorbey![1] (Goethe, 2007, para. 107)

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[1] "If ever I plead with the passing moment,
"Linger a while, you are so fair!"
Then chain me up in close confinement,
Then serving me no more's your care,
Then let the death bell toll my finish,
Then unreluctantly I'll perish,
The clock may stop, the hands fall off,
And time for me be over with!"
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ARTISTIC POWER, PLASTICITY AND THE DIONYSIAN IN NIETZSCHE AND POSTHUMAN AESTHETICS

Yunus Tuncel

Abstract

Nietzsche's teachings on power are often confined to his conception of the will to power, which has been narrowly interpreted as political power, 'political' understood in the limited sense of state ruling. Two things must be noted here: first, Nietzsche's philosophy of power exceeds the will to power, regardless of the fact that this concept played a significant role in Nietzsche's late writings. In this paper, I plan to show its broader context, including the feeling of power, affect, and other related notions. Second, the first time Nietzsche coins the term, the "will to power," the first occurrence appears in his Nachlass, it is used within the context of artistic power, as he discusses Wagner and the power of music. While examining power in its broadest significance, the focus here will be on the power of creativity, that is, artistic power, and how that plays a crucial role in Nietzsche's works. In this regard, I discuss two important aspects of his aesthetics, namely, the Dionysian and plasticity within the context of posthuman aesthetics, while also responding to (and expanding on my previous reflection on) Sorgner's recent work, Philosophy of Posthuman Art, and their relevance to contemporary society and artistic activities.

Keywords

Dionysian, plasticity, will to power, feeling of power, artistic power.

Introduction

A new aesthetic is born with the rise of post-modern, post-humanist age; the roots of this transformation go back to the shift from the classical age that finds its epitome in the Enlightenment to what may be called the 'post-modern' age, starting with the Industrial Revolution. It finds its expression in Nietzsche's announcement "God is dead" and is reflected in the thoughts of the first major critics of modernity, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, as Foucault brings them together. What marks the old, classical aesthetics is the conception of mimesis, or representation, that runs its course from ancient Greece all the way to the 18th and early 19th century. Under this paradigm, art was seen as imitation of nature, art was relegated to a lesser status in the overall economy of culture, as detached from one another; imagination was considered to be insignificant or a lesser faculty of the human mind, and the creative activity and its domain were confined to set rules and pre-determined media (the so-called seven sisters in the arts). However, much of these assumptions have started coming under scrutiny in the 18th century: romantics rebelled against rational and

mimetic conceptions of art, the sublime was introduced as a category of aesthetics (Burke and Kant), arts were approached in their union rather than isolation (Lessing), new ideas on the unity of arts emerged as in the conception of total art work (early Romantics who would later influence Wagner), and imagination was re-conceptualized as a significant faculty of the human mind and its role re-estimated (Kant). These and other discussions on art prepared the ground for new attitudes on arts and aesthetics that would emerge in the 19th century, all of which play a role in the new aesthetics along with new ways of approaching who and what the human being is in the light of critical positions on humanism (as in Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud). In this essay, I will focus on only a few aspects of this new posthuman aesthetics such as the artistic power (will to power as art), the Dionysian, and plasticity in Nietzsche and how they are relevant to posthumanism.

The Dionysian in Arts

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1967), Nietzsche presents two art impulses, as he calls them: the Apollinian and the Dionysian. The Dionysian is the *non-imagistic* art of music as opposed to the Apollinian plastic art and, as such, pertains to the symbolic—it is through the Dionysian that *symbolic powers* and *symbolism* are cultivated. Since image presupposes visible boundaries, symbol is the disappearance of these boundaries; the analogy of the visible and the invisible will hold to some extent. The Dionysian is not only in the domain of the invisible as in sound and constantly changing forms, but also implicit in the domain of the visible where and when its boundaries may collapse. To clarify some confusion in this area, we can say that the Dionysian and the Apollinian are, *more or less*, in all forms of art, just as they are everywhere or wherever there is individuation and the collapse of individuation in the broadest sense of this word. Otherwise, "Apollinian music" would not make any sense.

The Dionysian is an art *impulse or tendency* analogous to intoxication. The state of intoxication is the ecstatic state, which is a physiological condition; that is, a state of frenzy or rapture. Although the Dionysian does not strictly belong to the physical domain, understood as impulse, it is a somatic experience. In ecstasy one sees and feels oneself, in one's body, as the other or as one with nature. Now the term "intoxication" can be misleading although that seems to be the first choice for *Rausch* (the dictionary gives "ecstasy" as another option). Needless to repeat that this is an analogy, but for those who hang on the term itself and not heed the thought that underlies it, let's remind ourselves that ecstasy is broader than intoxication.

The Dionysian impulse drives us to ecstasy as though this impulse is as strong as the one that drives us to our self-preservation. Whether in dance or song, man jubilates in ecstatic moments. Where does this come from? Why is *ecstasy* blissful? The blissful ecstasy comes from the "innermost depths of man, indeed of nature" (BT, Nietzsche, 1967, sec.2, p. 40) or from man as nature. At the collapse of the principle of individuation, man is one with nature; this is what we call the "ecstatic moment". In this moment, nature celebrates the return of her lost son, lost, as though, to individuation; her suffering turns to joy. It may be in the sense of this suffering that "…nature seems to reveal a sentimental trait; it is as if she were heaving a sigh at her dismemberment into individuals." (BT, Nietzsche, 1967, sec.2, p.40). From the standpoint of man, it is the moment in which man, enchanted in ecstasy, feels as a work of art, a creation of nature among other creations. Here a distinction can be made between ecstasy as experience, as mentioned above, and "ecstasies" as particular forms of the *ecstatic experience* as in dance, song, pantomime, revelry, orgy, etc.—these two issues are interwoven in Nietzsche's text. In these ecstasies, he sees "…the significance of

festivals of world *redemption* and days of *transfiguration*." (BT, Nietzsche, 1967, Sec. 2, p. 40). In these festivals, man becomes his fellow man, an animal, a tree, so to speak; he is transfigured into his fellow creatures of nature.

The oneness with nature, where all is in all, is not only a union between man and man, but also a *reconciliation* between man and nature. However, this reconciliation is not a total loss of man in nature nor an irretrievable loss of his individuality; it is rather a break-down of barriers for a world-harmony, it is when divisions melt into a harmony. Nietzsche describes this state as "mystic feeling of oneness" or "mystical self-abnegation". If we lose sight of the unity of the Apollinian and the Dionysian and decontextualize the feeling of oneness from this unity, we end up in *l'ancienne regime* in which the value of individuality is underestimated. On the contrary, we already know Nietzsche's valuation of the individual from the principle of the Apollinian.

Furthermore, the Dionysian is *self-forgetfulness*. This is the moment when one falls into forgetfulness or takes a step away from his everydayness. Man lives in accordance with some interpretation of existence which underlies and governs what he does and the way he lives; it goes without saying, but better said in this age of ours, that there is a multiplicity of such interpretations of existence. Now in the Dionysian self-forgetfulness, the boundaries of his interpretation of existence melt, and he is in the moment of multiplicity of creation. "…as they [Dionysian emotions] grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness." (BT, Nietzsche, 1967, Sec. 1, p.36). In the same passage some examples of particular forms of the ecstatic experience are given, and Nietzsche points out to the dismissal, by moderns I presume, of these ecstasies as "folk-diseases."

The Dionysian, Post-Mimesis, Kandinsky et al, and Abstract Art

In this section, we will focus on Kandinsky as an example of the application of the Dionysian in post-mimetic art. It should be noted here that Kandinsky and abstract art are not the only post-mimetic art influenced by Nietzsche. Dadaism, surrealism, and expressionism are also indirectly or directly influenced by Nietzsche's ideas. Some of these ideas, such as the primacy of the unconscious and the dream world, may have gone into arts via psychoanalysis.

Foucault, in his *This is not a Pipe*, discusses Kandinsky's works in relation to those of other post-mimetic artists, Magritte, the main subject of the book, and Klee. After exploring text-image relationship in Magritte's works and how it has been transformed caligrammatically, he writes on Klee's works that they address the problem of "the separation between plastic representation (which implies resemblance) and linguistic reference (which excludes it)" (Foucault, 1983, p. 32). Let's call this "the separation principle". According to this principle, either the text is ruled by the image, or the image is ruled by the text. There is always domination and subordination, but no playful interaction in which both have their say as they oscillate between one another; "verbal signs and visual representations are never given at once" (Foucault, 1983, p. 33). Foucault claims that it was Klee who broke this principle "by showing the juxtaposition of shapes and the syntax of lines in an uncertain, reversible, floating space" (Foucault, 1983, p. 33). Figures in his paintings are also elements of writing, and letters and texts are drawn as integral parts of the painting seen as figures (sometimes recognizable as letters). There is also a play between the title and a figure in the painting. In a way, figures and letters are in a Dionysian relation as they inter-penetrate.

The second principle posits "an equivalence between the fact of resemblance and the affirmation of a representative bond" (Foucault, 1983, p. 34). I will call this "the equivalence principle." Here if a figure resembles an object, that becomes sufficient for a statement "what you see is that" to dominate the experience of that painting. This statement is often silent and looms over both the spectacle and the spectator, and finds its apex especially in realism. What the realist artist represents are exactly those objects, nature, human beings, flowers, etc. According to Foucault, this principle was shattered by Kandinsky:

> a double effacement simultaneously of resemblance and of the representative bond, by the increasingly insistent affirmation of the lines, the colors that Kandinsky called "things," neither more nor less objects than the church, the bridge, or the knight with his bow. (Foucault, 1983, p. 34)

In Kandinsky's abstract art (he is its founder), one sees no direct representation of objects; one can hardly decipher what is painted on the canvas, or each spectator has his/her own perception of it. By treating color as a "thing," Kandinsky broke away from the equivalence principle of classical model of representation.

Kandinsky had read Nietzsche and, as one reads it in his *The Spiritual in Art* (1946) applied the Dionysian to his art, which is the beginning of abstract art, not to mention many other ideas from Nietzsche. For Kandinsky, art is not created out of nothing, nor is it just an external object that is viewed by spectators. It is rather embedded in the very culture in which it is created, it reflects the spirit, the values, the sentiments of the artist and the Zeitgeist. It does not exist in isolation. And all others in the same time period are connected to one another; this is why Kandinsky, though not a musician, speaks on music and exposes close affinities between impressionism and Debussy. By "spiritual," though not the best word for "Geistlich," he means culture. All things are bound together through the Dionysian in their own historic context. Kandinsky speaks further on the inner sentiments and emotions of the artist, which, no doubt, relate to the values of the artist as they also relate to the values of the times, the Zeitgeist. He often speaks of an "inner spiritual need" which also reflects the needs of the times of the artist's epoch. "That is to be considered beautiful which results from an inner spiritual need, as only that which is spiritual can be beautiful" (Kandinsky, 1946, p. 5).

One can see the presence of the Dionysian in Kandinsky's works in at least two ways: first, as Foucault suggests, colors and objects are in a chiasmatic relationship; color is seen in its own being but also in its chiasmatic relationship with figures present. Second, there are no discernible figures that represent any "real" objects. In fact, there is a gradual move from representational painting to post-representational one in Kandinsky. One can see this shift around 1910, shortly before and after. Posthumanist aesthetics is post-mimetic and these art movements embody post-modern and posthumanist ideas. Mimesis was the project of ultra-rationalism and made its impact on the arts for more than two millennia in the west in different ways. This is not to say that mimetic functions (those of imitation and representation) can be or should be excluded from the economy or arts and culture; however, they cannot be the only or the dominant forms of artistic expression.

Plasticity in Arts

The word "plastic," now the name for a household item, comes from the Greek word "plastein" which means "to mold". While Nietzsche uses the term in association with visual arts, as in painting and sculpture, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and also with the Apollonian, in his following works, specifically in the second *Untimely Meditation*, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, he uses it in a broader cultural context. It must be noted that plasticity is often associated with visual and plastic arts, as it first connotes a physical action in a physical medium. Nietzsche, as he does with many words, uses "plastic" and its derivatives in broader contexts. For him, it lies at the core of self-transformation; he turns a visual tool into his philosophy of self-making.
The plastic powers are needed for cultural transformation:

> I mean by plastic power the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds. (Nietzsche, 1983, p. 62)

He goes on to say that there are those who lack this power and they will perish at the slightest wound; on the other hand, those who have it will not be impacted by the worst disasters. Nietzsche presents this notion of plastic force or power within the context of his historiography the core ideas of which are based on two sets of three notions: First, the set of the historical, the unhistorical and the supra-historical; and second, the set of the antiquarian, the monumental and the critical. One must be able to forget (the unhistorical) as much as one remembers (the historical) based on a strong, long-sighted vision (the supra-historical) and one must re-create great works (monumental) as one preserves (antiquarian) and destroys (critical). Clearly, plastic powers, the power of molding, works in both layers of self-transformation through "history". What disturbs the forces of culture is the excess of history, historic consciousness, and knowledge. These excesses prevent self-transformation at different levels: first, it binds people to their status quo, including its problems; second, it focuses on knowledge alone to the neglect of the power of creation and action, or "artistic power". The malady of history can be healed through the development of the unhistorical and the supra-historical, as Nietzsche reminds youth at the end of his essay; "history" must be for life and life forces, as artistic/plastic powers interpret history for life. Nietzsche had not yet come upon his insights on power and artistic power, but these early ideas project in that direction.

Nietzsche's description of this necessary plastic power is similar to the artistic process and how an artist is in constant flux in that process. There are temporary stops and boundaries, but these do not remain as such. No doubt, a framing is needed to show the work of art. What makes the process fluid and rich are the acts of assimilation and appropriation, as Nietzsche presents it: "The stronger the innermost roots of a man's nature, the more readily will he be able to assimilate and appropriate the things of the past…" (Nietzsche, 1983, pp. 62-63). Nietzsche's beloved ancient Greeks assimilated and appropriated much from their neighboring cultures, including myths, cults, architecture, sciences (math and astronomy), and calendar systems and yet they gave them their own shape and stamp. Although Nietzsche uses the singular pronoun here, what he says applies to both individuals and cultures. No doubt horizons and boundaries are needed to be able to create, although there are no fixed, eternal boundaries;

> … and the most powerful and tremendous nature would be characterized by the fact that it would know no boundary at all at which the historical sense began to overwhelm it; it would draw to itself and incorporate into itself all the past, its own and that most foreign to it, and as it were transform it into blood. (Nietzsche, 1983, p. 63)

Nietzsche's description reads like a physiological process, analogous to how stomach and other digestive organs process food, familiar or unfamiliar, absorbs and processes what is good for the body. We must, however, be cautious in drawing such parallels, as the body of culture is not the same as the organic body. To be healthy, strong and fruitful, Nietzsche repeats, one must be bounded by a horizon. There must be boundaries, though fluid, in and through which such re-creation can happen, as one remembers at the right time and forgets at the right time.

It is not sufficient to have a body of knowledge and information, however immense that body may be, as is the case today with online sources of information, Googles and AIs, a culture must have plastic powers in its arsenal. It is through these powers that a culture places all its forces at the service of the present and the future; otherwise, a body of knowledge, however immense, can also annihilate life, as we have seen in the wars of the last centuries. Nietzsche's critique of ultra-rationalism by way of Socrates in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1967) is now extended in a different context, the context of historiography in the 19th century:

> These are the services history is capable of performing for life; every man and every nation requires, in accordance with its goals, energies and needs, a certain kind of knowledge of the past, now in the form of monumental, now of antiquarian, now of critical history: *but it does not require it as a host of pure thinkers who only look on at life, of knowledge-thirsty individuals whom knowledge alone will satisfy and to whom the accumulation of knowledge is itself the goal*… . (Nietzsche, 1983, p. 77, emphasis is mine)

Humans are not just walking encyclopedias and knowledge is not sufficient to build a robust life and culture. Yes, a certain degree of information and knowledge is necessary, but what is of utmost importance is how they fit with schemes of re-creation. Nietzsche is creating a contrast here between the Alexandrian culture of knowledge and plastic powers. But the more specific contrast lies between "the malady of history"—and there is a close relationship between the Alexandrian culture and the malady of history— and plastic powers, as he states in the last section of the second *Untimely Meditation*. Referring to youth and life, he writes: "…it is suffering from the *malady of history*. Excess of history has attacked life's plastic powers, it no longer knows how to employ the past as a nourishing food…" (Nietzsche, 1983, p. 120). He continues with proposing remedies for this malady. As is typical for Nietzsche as a physician of culture, he offers both diagnosis, prognosis, and remedies. Here his remedies are the unhistorical and the suprahistorical, placed next to or in agonistic opposition to the historical, so as to empower plastic forces in a new constellation of *art*, *religion* and *science*.

The Will to Power and Artistic Power

When one hears the word "power," one is taken aback, because humans have been accustomed to repressive power structures and their conception of power has come to mean just that. However, all beings emanate power and all humans exercise power in one form or another. Power is neither negative or positive or can be both, can be both repressive or uplifting. Nietzsche is the first radical thinker of power who shed all biases against power; unfortunately, some of his ideological detractors did not read his works in-depth, because of their immediate agendas, and sought justification for their paternalistic/autocratic power system. In contrast, Nietzsche envisions a value system based on active rather than reactive power.

It must be noted at the outset that Nietzsche's philosophy of power cannot be confined to the notion of the "will to power," despite the emphasis he places on it. Parallel to this notion, Nietzsche had also developed ideas on the "feeling of power". Both complement one another and overlap in many ways. We may start with a few notes on the feeling of power. The first context in which this expression appears is cruelty in *Daybreak* (1982, §18); here and elsewhere Nietzsche tries to understand power in terms of a set of feelings, especially those of joy and suffering, but also in terms of pity. There are always feelings, at bottom affects, that are associated with power and its exercise. Regarding this association between suffering and power, we can also study his views on punishment, that is, how punishment itself is an exercise of power. "By punishing himself he is exercising his power" (Nietzsche, 1982, §187). Although here the punishment in question is a self-punishment, it is nonetheless an exercise of power whether it is on oneself or on others. It is an exercise of power in the form of infliction of suffering.

In *The Gay Science* (1974, §13), he expands on this point by saying that "benefit and hurting others are ways of exercising one's power upon others," and adds that "pain is a much more efficient means to that end than pleasure". Why is this so? Why is pain more associated with power than pleasure? Do we not exercise power when we give pleasure to others or benefit them somehow? Nietzsche's response is interesting: "pain always raises the question about its origin while pleasure is inclined to stop with itself without looking back" (GS, 1974, §13). In other words, because pleasure benefits us, we don't question its origin; but not so, with pain. Ultimately, power is exercised through giving and taking pain and pleasure; sometimes they can even be blended together.

There is also a close association between power and truth. In the second paragraph of *The Gay Science* (1974, §13), Nietzsche brings up the connection between power and truth, showing how they reinforce one another reciprocally. Those have the "Truth" on their side (those who believe in one absolute truth as in humanism and modernity, for instance) will always cling to their feeling of power, and this feeling in turn will solidify their belief in their "Truth," creating a vicious circle. It is not only truth that has this type of relationship to power, but also knowledge, a point Nietzsche presents in *The Gay Science* (1974, §110):

> …eventually knowledge and the striving for the true found their place as a need among other needs… Thus, knowledge became a piece of life itself, and hence a continually growing power… A thinker is now that being in whom the impulse for truth and those life-preserving errors clash for their first fight…

Both knowledge and truth become empowered, and in the process the role of the impulses and instincts is denied. Whether denied or not, truth and knowledge always bear a relationship to the body and its forces; for Nietzsche the question is how this relationship is construed.

Moreover, power is directly related to taste and temperament. Nietzsche uses the term "spice" (Nietzsche, 1974, §13) here to indicate that it is a matter of taste whether one chooses slow or fast, brave or not so brave exercise of power, which he also sees as a function of the temperament of the individual; all of these are relevant to the artistic processes and creative acts. On a final note to *The Gay Science* (1974, §13), Nietzsche brings up the question of power relations among peers and among non-peers within the context of suffering. For the first type of power relations he gives the example of proud natures who are hard against suffering and are ready to fight their peers; for the second type, those who have and act out of pity since they have little pride and no prospects for any conquest.

Another important issue in Nietzsche's philosophy of power, is power over oneself or self-mastery. Nietzsche suggests, in *Daybreak* (1982, §65), that those who can control themselves are also accustomed to a feeling of power. Now this self-control can be interpreted in different ways, but I read it as the Apollonian self-mastery, self-knowledge, one must be able to set limits on and to one's own self, which Nietzsche discusses often. The possession of oneself, one's power, is also related to this (Nietzsche, 1982, §437), although I would not have used to term "possess" in relation to power.

This individual self-mastery may be the starting point to understand power and power relations in Nietzsche. Ultimately, we feel power within ourselves; how do we feel it, how do we empower the different forces that are within us? These questions remain crucial. No doubt, we are thrown into an ethos of power; that is, a way of relating to power and power constellations, which have existed before us, which we have not created. This makes the power problem circular: is power individual or is it collective or is it both? Who creates the ethos of power? All of these questions point to value and value-creation among which we can count the ethos of power. Power, value, truth is one of circular relationships in Nietzsche's philosophy of power to be pondered over.

Although all of the points made above have some connection to artistic power, we have not spoken directly about it based on Nietzsche's writing. Let's first explore briefly his ideas on the will to power and its origin. The text where the will to power appears in the *Nachlass* for the first time runs as follows:

> The main element of ambition is to come to the feeling of one's power. The joy of power is not to be traced back onto that which we rejoice and remain admired in the opinion of others. Praise and blame, love and hate are the same for the ambition seeker (the ambitious) who wills power.
> Fear of power (negative) and will to power (positive) explain our strong regard for the opinion of human beings.
> Pleasure for power—the pleasure for power is explained by the displeasure of dependence, powerlessness, experienced in hundred ways. If this experience is not there, then the pleasure is also lacking. (KS 8, p. 425, translation is mine)

Here we see the larger context of power in the first formulation of the will to power. Joy of power, pleasure for power, fear of power and powerlessness are reflected upon, and the

will to power is considered to be positive. We are always in power relations, which we must acknowledge in all *honesty* and not only in their outward manifestations.

On the other hand, the first appearance of "the will to power," in his published works is to be found in *Zarathustra* I, "On the Thousand and One Goals" (Nietzsche, 2005). It appears within the context of Zarathustra's journey, the journey of self-creation. As Zarathustra seeks and creates himself in his solitude (his cave is one of the symbols for this), he interacts with a variety of types in different proximities to him; Zarathustra ultimately symbolizes the type of value-creator. But of a different sort: we can go on this journey with Zarathustra to the extent that we too are seekers and creators. Now, in his journey, what is the greatest power that Zarathustra has seen? It is the power of good and evil (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 170), which means, the power of values. Right here, in the first appearance of the will to power, we see what is at stake for Nietzsche, the question of values, and the problematic of power is posed within the context of value (good and evil, tablets or tablets of the good, all these expressions imply values and valuations). After Zarathustra emphasizes the diversity of peoples and their values and the fact that they do not understand one another, he says: "A tablet of good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power" (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 170). We all live according to some values or a value-system, even if no value-system is eternal and it is constantly recreated as overcoming of one generation over the previous one. This is how human power ultimately manifests itself; it creates values.

One problem in today's world is the inheritance of patriarchal structures and their top to bottom imposition. Sorgner and other posthumanist thinkers have emphasized how problematic these approaches to power have been, which remove sovereignty from individuals and disable them from exercising power, and how it is necessary to empower individuals through various means. All beings are powerful and the main question from a Nietzschean, Foucauldian, and posthumanist standpoint is how one exercises power, in what modalities and relationalities. No doubt, new technologies in arts and in general are some forms of empowerment. In his recent book, *Philosophy of Posthuman Art* (2022), Sorgner speaks of cryptoart and other digital media for artistic creations and reconceives the notion of total art work as its totalitarian connotations are removed. I must also add here that we have to un-learn repressive, "reactive" forms of power and learn how to exercise and promote "active" forms of power in our creative deeds, as Nietzsche understands them in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1969) and as Deleuze expanded on these ideas in his book on Nietzsche, *Nietzsche & Philosophy* (1983).

Conclusion

In short, power is first and foremost of the power of creation, the creative deed. Power must be understood from ground up, from the primary psycho-somatic drives and registers to their sublimation and channeling. How does one address these drives and transfigure them into works of creation, whether they be one's own self, values, institutions or works of art? We must understand the way power works and its many possible modes of operation in order to create collectives in which all beings find their place in existence and learn how to co-exist; we can re-integrate the fragmented whole through renewed power relations. From a Nietzschean standpoint, that form of power is active power which accepts the diversity of life and enhances all life forms and all beings. Molding and transforming through plasticity and artistic power, through active forms of power remains one fundamental teaching of Nietzsche's works from which we can learn in the age of posthumanism. We

are faced with many problems today and we need, not prescriptive, outdated, but rather creative and thoughtful approaches to these problems. And one can find many insights and ideas on those relevant parts of Nietzsche's works, which need to be creatively, critically, and plastically adapted to the needs of our times.

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AN APPROACH TO PATRICIA PICCININI'S POSTHUMAN ARTWORKS: THROUGH THE LENS OF A WEAK NIETZSCHEANISM

Aura Elena Schussler

Abstract

Patricia Piccinini's artistic creations vividly encapsulate the essence of posthuman aesthetics, portraying a captivating realm where the boundaries between humans, non-humans, nature, culture, and technology dissolve. Her hyperrealistic sculptures draw our attention to the intricate layers that make up both natural organisms and those that have undergone or will undergo alterations through genetic manipulation. This aspect underscores the ongoing evolution of matter through (bio)technological advancements. Notably, works such as "Sphinx" (2012), "The Field" (2018), "The Balance" (2019), the "Between the Shadow and the Soul" exhibition (2020), and the diorama "Patricia Piccinini: Encounters of Another Plot Installation" (2023) embody an Apollonian-Dionysian interplay, interpreted through a wean Nietzschean lens. This analysis employs Stefan Sorgner's concept of the "twist," which, in the context of Piccinini's posthuman art, challenges traditional norms in art, science, and technology. The general objective of this paper is to show that, in a weak Nietzschean interpretation, Piccinini's posthuman artworks encapsulate the dynamic forces of the process of permanent becoming. The theoretical focus is twofold: first, to examine the Apollonian-Dionysian "twist" and its influence on aesthetic categories such as beauty and the grotesque, blending human, non-human, natural, artificial, and technological elements into a new unity of posthuman aesthetic; and second, to explore structural analogies between Nietzsche's concept of the overhuman and Piccinini's works, specifically "Still Life with Stem Cells" (2002) and the "Alone With the Gods" exhibition (2016). This study adopts a weak Nietzschean perspective, envisioning the overhuman as a metaphor for future biotechnological progress.

Keywords

Patricia Piccinini, weak Nietzscheanism, Apollonian, Dionysian, overhuman, monsters, chimeras.

Introduction

Patricia Piccinini's art reflects the posthuman aesthetic, embodying a world that blurs the boundaries between humans, non-humans, nature, culture, and technology. Through her hyperrealistic sculptures, she creates a fluid and interconnected inter-species relationship, where humans and non-humans coexist and become entangled through scientific and technological means by revealing a " 'naturaltechnical' worlds at stake" (Haraway, 2011, p.

95). As outlined by Sorgner (2022a) in his book *Philosophy of Posthuman Art*, posthuman artworks embrace a state of non-duality. In Patricia Piccinini's creations, this non-duality emerges from a non-dualistic ontology linked to the process of perpetual becoming. Her artistic creations reveal a concealed unity between "hybridity" and "monstrosity," which defines the interconnected relationships among humans, non-humans, and more-than-human forms of life. This unique perspective brings a "twist" to the realms of art, science and ontology. According to Sorgner (2022a), posthuman art is predominantly characterized by the constant process of permanent becoming, understood both in a Nietzschean and a Heraclitean paradigm. Similar to Heraclitus, Nietzsche perceives the world as a continual process of becoming in every aspect (Sorgner, 2022a; 2022b). What posthuman art and artworks represent in this process of becoming is still an ongoing and unpredictable phenomenon characterized by inclusiveness, plurality, open interpretations, and perspectivism (Sorgner, 2022a, p. 14). Thus, in a weak Nietzschean approach—which brings a fluid perspectivism into the spotlight—Piccinini's posthuman artworks involve Sorgner's concept of "twist" (Sorgner, 2022a). In this paradigm, the Sorgnerian concept of the "twist" highlights a non-dualistic perspective within the posthuman paradigm shift. It rests on twisting previously segregated elements—such as human and non-human, nature and culture, beauty and grotesque, and the organic and technological—challenging the boundaries imposed by humanistic and metaphysical assumptions. This process forms a new unity, revealed through posthuman artworks. Thus, in Piccinini's posthuman artistic creations, the aesthetics of twisting result from the interwoven aesthetic categories of beauty and the grotesque—under the image of monsters—as well as from a non-dualistic anthropology of permanent becoming under the image of hybrids and chimeras. In addition, the affirmative nature of her monsters and chimeras' points to the complex relationship of posthuman discourses grounded on ontological and bodily fluidity, as well as on biotechnological advancement. In a weak Nietzschean paradigm of thinking, Piccinini's sculptures reveal the twist, rendered by the resuscitation of the concept of chimera (from the past) as a trans-genic organism in the present. It follows that her sculptures present the "twist" by opening new perspectives that bring together unity and difference in a continuous flow of interconnections and becomings that "develop the past further in an inclusive manner" (Sorgner, 2022a, p. 52). From a Deleuzian perspective, Piccinini's posthuman artworks embody the "actualization of the virtual," a process occurring simultaneously in a non-linear manner. This involves the mechanism of twisting (Sorgner, 2022a; Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 327-350; Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, pp. 148-152), wherein the lines of flight from both past and future converge and penetrate the present. This dynamic fosters differentiation and perpetual becoming, transcending the boundaries of a dualistic worldview. Such a perspective deepens our psychophysiological connection to the intricate assemblages that define existence.

Building on this line of thought, we can observe how Piccinini skillfully revives ancient notions of "monsters" and "chimeras," reinterpreting them through her art and intertwining these concepts with the contemporary technocultural networks of hybrids and cyborgs emerging from advancements in biotechnology. The way Piccinini's sculptures map the rhizomatic variations of existence, marked by critical thresholds of equilibrium, find their convergences in the way Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, tells us how to approach art, science and life. For Nietzsche, it is to "look at science through the prism of the artist, but also to look at art through the prism of life" (1999, p. 5). In a weak Nietzschean interpretation, it follows that Piccinini explores in a fluid manner the realm of science through her artistic lens, examining the realms of art through the lens of life and posthuman

existence in a non-dualistic approach that opens up new perspectives of interpretation with regard to making, understanding, and experiencing art. In this regard, her approach harmoniously integrates the characteristics of both the "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" aspects of artistic expression into the 'twist'. The idea of the "overhuman" can also be observed in some of her artworks. In order to show this, I will analyze a few of her posthuman artworks and exhibitions, in the form of "Still Life with Stem Cells" (2002), "Sphinx" (2012), "Alone With The Gods" exhibition (2016), "The Field" (2018), "The Balance" (2019), "Between the Shadow and the Soul" exhibition (2020), and the Diorama "Patricia Piccinini: encounters of another plot installation" (2023).

Reminiscences of the Apollonian and Dionysian Elements in Piccinini's Posthuman Artworks

Piccinini's sculptures open a window into a world where the interplay of the Apollonian and Dionysian energies is revived through the process of twisting. This intricate fusion is portrayed through a chain of interconnectedness, encompassing the realms of biology, technology, and the human, non-human and more-than-human fluid posthuman existence. In Piccinini's work, this Apollonian-Dionysian dynamic weaves cycles of destruction and creation, giving rise to innovative life forms—monsters and chimeras—that are reminiscent of earthly beings while featuring reimagined physical structures and adaptive survival mechanisms within uncanny environments. The twist is completed by the weaving of the Apollonian dreamworld with the Dionysian world of excess. By exploring advancements in biotechnology, "bio-engineered redifferentiating" and kinships between species, Piccinini's sculptures delves into the very essence of the posthuman, thereby reshaping the landscape of art itself (Antonson, 2019; Haraway, 2011). Through this transformative lens, a new world emerges, one that dissolves the limitations of humanity by taking inspiration from mythology, the future of trans-genetic organisms, and the intricate web of connections between various species. For instance, we may observe this aesthetics of twisting in Piccinini's exhibition from 2020, entitled "Between the Shadow and the Soul". This is composed of 30 works meticulously crafted exclusively for Helsinki Taidehalli, in Finland (Mustonen, 2020). In this exhibition, the twist is present, beginning with the title of the exhibition, which emphasizes the intertwining of the ontological categories separated until now, such as the body and the mind, or the material (the body) and the immaterial (the soul). Here, the shadow is the expression of the presence of the material body, which carries the soul as the expression of the presence of aesthetic experience and emotions woven into our psychophysiological constitution. They are intertwined under the flow of monsters, hybrid amorphous bodies, and mixed affects through the artwork and the aesthetic experience of the viewer, where "the immaterial mind and the material body get woven into a psychophysiological unity" (Sorgner, 2022a, p. 121).

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999), Nietzsche explores art as a dynamic interplay of opposing energies, likening it to a frenetic dance of contrasts. One of these forces embodies structure, control, creation, and harmony, representing the Apollonian dimension of artistic expression. Conversely, Nietzsche (1999) contends that art also embraces an untamed, chaotic essence, marked by danger and the potential for complete destruction. This quality aligns with the Dionysian aspect of art, inspired by Dionysus—the ancient Greek god of chaos, destruction, excess, wine, and music—whose influence profoundly shaped European culture through themes of sensuality, eroticism, and indulgence.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999), Nietzsche examines art through a lens of intricately woven opposing energies. He perceives it as a frenetic dance between conflicting forces. One force emphasizes the importance of structure, control, creation, and harmony. This force represents the Apollonian aspect of artistic expression. On the other hand, Nietzsche (1999) argued that art also encompasses an unpredictable and disorderly essence, imbued with a sense of peril and the potential for complete destruction. He attributed this particular artistic inclination to the Dionysian aspect of artistic expression, inspired by Dionysus—the ancient Greek deity associated with chaos, destruction, excess, wine, and music—whose influence shaped a European culture steeped in sensuality, eroticism, and self-gratification.

Furthermore, Nietzsche emphasizes that Apolline art is that "of the image-maker or sculptor (*Bildner*)" (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 14). At first glance, it follows that sculpture, as an artistic expression characterized by pure form—which is also the main way Piccinini expresses most of her posthuman artworks—stands as the epitome of the Apollonian art of form-giving, associated with beauty. However, the sculptures she creates possess a remarkable fluidity and an air of unpredictability, capturing unconventional shapes that exude the essence of Dionysus by encompassing the grotesque and chaos. The Apollonian aspect of artistic expression is a term inspired by Apollo, the God of creation, related to all kinds of creative forces. He is described as the "luminous one," "the driver of dreams" (Nietzsche, 1999, pp. 16, 25), the God of prophecy and rationality in Greek mythology. Representing logic, structure, and individuation, this force embodies the creative and scientific processes rooted in rational frameworks. In Piccinini's sculptures, this Apollonian essence manifests in her fusion of emerging technologies with mythology, showcasing an intricate Apollonian-Dionysian twist. This artistic interplay juxtaposes the ancient idea of the chimera with modern technological advancements in biotechnology, synthetic biology, and genetic manipulation, resulting in the creation of new life forms in the posthuman artistic landscape. In such an Apollonian-Dionysian aesthetic of twisting, both the destructive and the creative forces are present in different aspects.

Piccinini's work also engages with Nietzsche's (1999) *principium individuationis*—the Apollonian drive for differentiation and individuation. But her sculptures reflect what Braidotti (2013) describes as an "affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 49). Such a twist brings about a non-unitary subject which creates a plurality of "contingent nodal points" (Sorgner, 2022a). In the metaphysical tradition, *principium individuationis* has a tendency to establish order and organization, consequently leading to the differentiation and distinct separation of individuals from one another. According to Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999), this Apollonian concept signifies the essence of individualization, being the driving force behind the creation of society, individuals, civilizations, and more. In other words, it embodies the social and historical power responsible for shaping these fundamental aspects of human existence. However, Piccinini's creations, reinterpret this concept through a lens of posthuman fluidity, embracing interconnectedness and continuous evolution.

For example, in her artworks such as "Sphinx" (2012) or "The Balance" (2019), we may find a twist of this essence of individualization under the loop of creation and fluid continuous becoming in the posthuman paradigm shift, born out of the possibility of various species cross-breeding in a nature-techno-culture ecosystem. They also reveal the Dionysian endeavor to depict the essence of a nature-culture continuum that surpasses the confines of human comprehension. These artworks are focused on a fluid individual awareness, which gradually comes to reveal endless organic and more-than-organic shapes, and the idiosyncrasies of posthuman individual identity, which relate to the Dionysian

aspect of chaos (Millner, 2001). For instance, in the "Sphinx" (2012)—which is also present in the "Between the Shadow and the Soul" exhibition—instead of featuring a human head such as is depicted on the legendary mythical creatures of Ancient Greece and Egypt that protected temples, the figure showcases a concave void that bears a striking resemblance to the female genitalia (Mustonen, 2020). This peculiar choice symbolizes the sacred space of Dionysian lust, where procreation takes place (where the forces of creation come to life from the chaotic energies of eroticism and fecundity). In addition, this creature exudes an aura of fertility, embodying the very origin of individuals and, by extension, societies and civilizations, under the Apollonian essence. It also shows the twist within the interlacing of mythology with technology (in the sense of reproduction). It is about an ontologically (open) all-possible (Dionysian) flow and its ontic contingent counterpart (Apollonian), which illustrates the fluid and non-dualistic relationship between chaotic existence and physical reality, which permits new unities to emerge.

In "The Balance" (2019), the *principium individuationis* is twisted in this tendency to establish order and organization in the realm of techno-genetic cross-breeding, which dissolves the ontological boundaries between the natural and the artificial. One of Apollo's most extraordinary abilities, in a weak Nietzschean interpretation, lies in its capacity to impose being on becoming; to construe the universe in a manner that enables one to perceive the permanent becoming of the world as one of stability and permanence, as a world of being (Sorgner, 2007). In "The Balance" (2019), this new world of being is encapsulated in the dynamic (Dionysian)–static (Apollonian) flow of a twisted individualization. It is a world where the interplay between humanity and the vastness of nature and technology is weaving the fusion of the Apollonian stability with the Dionysian chaotic essence of turbulence and uncertainty. These distinct organisms, as some sort of techno-animalic creatures, are consistently engaged in the process of actively constructing their own unique and stable identities, born out of the Apollonian-Dionysian twist. This twist brings to light both the "Apollonian dreamworld which focuses on stasis" (Nietzsche, 1928/2013, foreword by Ulfers, p. 5) and the Dionysian essence which can be characterized by its refusal to adhere to strict categories, together with its inclination to dissolve the distinctions between human bio-technologies and the natural world: "Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind" (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 18). Such a Dionysian essence is also encountered in Piccinini's posthuman artworks, such as in "No Fear of Depths" (2019) which reveals the intricate entanglement between artificially-created entities and the natural world, as well as the delicate interplay between humans and their surrounding environment. Or in the diorama entitled "Patricia Piccinini: encounters of another plot installation" exhibited at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, in 2023, which functions as a natural home for the artistic sculptures created by Piccinini. In this installation, the artist seeks to investigate different bodies and the interconnectivity they share by twisting the ontological boundaries between the human and the animal and between the natural and the artificial. These interconnections encompass the intricate Apollonian-Dionysian weaves between nature and genetically modified creatures. Moreover, she delves into the nuanced interplay between these "animal-pomorphic" creatures and their surrounding environment, all while considering the juxtaposition of artificial and natural elements. These "animal-pomorphic" creatures with their mammalian characteristics, have emerged through the process of evolution following the devastation of the Earth (Piccinini, 2023). Within these beings, the artist's Apollonian-Dionysian twist is embodied, evoking the power of destruction, not as a finality, but rather

as a gateway to new beginnings and becomings. It symbolizes the perpetual cycle of destruction and creation, serving as a harmonious artistic connection linking the uncontrollable cosmic forces with the fragile core of human existence. Thus, these forces, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, fulfill nature's innate artistic desires in the most direct and immediate manner.

A similar example is "The Field" (2018)—an installation where Piccinini offers a captivating display of a field full of flowers that have been genetically modified. It is an environment in which sculptures such as "The Bond" (2016), "The Pollinator" (2017) and "Kindred" (2018), co-create a boundless world of sexuality, motherhood, and fecundity. "The Bond" (2016) broadens the essence of motherhood by pushing it beyond classical biological parameters, towards a profound bond formed between the two creatures (the human mother and her transgenic child) (Biscaia, 2019). In "Kindred" (2018), the image of an orangutan-like mother and her children (one human and the other chimera) emphasizes our shared animalness with simians by twisting the ontological duality between humans and animals. The fluidity between animal and plant is vividly portrayed in the whole field, as the physical shapes of these "hybrid, protean flowers" evoke memories of the ancient neolithic "Venus figurines" (Piccinini, 2018). The ontological categories of the animal and the vegetal are also twisted and woven into the amorphous unity of "hybrid uterine-crabflowers" (Monteith, 2018). This installation is also a metaphor for "The chariot of Dionysus, laden with flowers and wreaths" (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 18), and imbued with sexual intoxication. As with Nietzsche, Dionysian art revolves around the exploration of intoxication and an elevated state of ecstasy and excess (Nietzsche, 1928/2013). For him, sexuality is both an indispensable physiological precondition and an intoxication needed for art: "for there to be art or any sort of aesthetic action or vision... Above all, the intoxication of sexual excitement" is "the most ancient and original form of intoxication" (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 195). Piccinini's versatile blossoms embody multiple connotations of such intoxication, encompassing sexuality, fertility, and procreation, akin to a triumphant affirmation of life, reminiscent of the Greek symbolism of the Dionysian. For example, "Bootflower" (2015), a sculpture relevant to this discourse, represents a human-animal-plant hybrid unity, combining human, animal, and plant characteristics. It uniquely produces eggs—not as human or animal offspring or plant shoots—but as a symbolic act of self-propagation, transcending species essentialism to underscore its innate drive for continuity and survival. Complementing this, "The Pollinator" (2017) suggests a narrative of fertilization. This piece features a child-chimera positioned before an unusual pair of legs in an ithyphallic stance, poised to release fertile material at the perfect moment for insemination in the field. Here, the concept of excess is rendered through the myriads of sexual organs symbolized by these hybrid uterine-crabflowers and pollinators, which reveal the metaphor of "bliss born of pain" (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 27) as the real "Will" of perpetual becoming (Nietzsche, 1928/2013). In a weak Nietzschean interpretation, this idea highlights the prominent themes of sexuality and reproduction, in Nietzsche's *Birts of Tragedy*, thereby expanding on Schopenhauer's premise that sex embodies the central essence of the "Will" (Nietzsche, 1999). In addition, the Apollonian essence of dream-image, in the captivating realm of "The Field", results from the "variety and complexity of nature, as it arises from a limited vocabulary of form" (Piccinini, 2018).

By weaving these opposing forces, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, Nietzsche argued that artists could effectively convey the contrasting elements of human existence, harmonizing them within a cohesive entity under the loop of tragedy (Nietzsche, 1999). His vast references to Greek tragedy are meant to inspire us with regard to how to learn from

art to see the beauty of life and to embrace "amor fati" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 157). In tragedy, these contrasting oppositions, such as creation-destruction, life-death, or Eros-Tanathos, are twisted into a new unity, where the Apollonian and Dionysian forces are unexpectedly brought together, serving to shed light on one another by revealing a non-dualist ontology of becoming (Nietzsche, 2005). However, in Piccinini's artworks that I examined, we can see that on the Dionysian side, both the destructive and the creative forces are present. The twist is revealed by the fact that Nietzsche portrays Dionysus as a "Versucher-Gott", i.e., "a tempter god, attempter god (experimenter)," a "searcher" and "researcher" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 124). Here, Nietzsche's different conception of the Dionysian is represented by a desire for "destruction, for change, and for becoming" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 235), which means that Nietzsche's Dionysian refers to a way of life that also embraces the concept of surpassing human limitations and aligning oneself with the overhuman.

"Alone With The Gods" (2016), "Still Life with Stem Cells" (2002), and the Overhuman

Piccinini's installation entitled "Alone With The Gods" (2016), made in collaboration with Peter Hennessey, encompasses the concept of the overhuman in various aspects. This installation explores the fluidity of ontological boundaries and the twist brought about by the posthuman condition. It reveals an evolutionary step that gives rise to the overhuman (as the posthuman) out of the image of the higher man in the 'post-death-of-God' paradigm (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. xviii). As she declared in an interview in 2016 for the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, "*Alone with the Gods* is about a group of people, survivalist-type people, that have secluded themselves away. They have a different way of seeing the world..." (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016a). These survivalist figures echo Zarathustra's journey, invoking themes of isolation, enlightenment, and profound existential insights. They tell the story of an Armageddon through a TV screen, embodying the awareness of the death of God while seeking new meaning. Their realization aligns with Nietzsche's call: "Dead are all gods: now we want the overman to live" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 232). In a weak Nietzschean interpretation, these figures act as witnesses to the emergence of the overhuman. Central to the installation is "The Big Guy" (2016), referred to by Piccinini as the "leader." He represents the metaphor of the 'chosen one' from whom the overhuman will be born, and who possess characteristics of higher humanity or, as Nietzsche says,

> …from you who have chosen yourselves a chosen people shall grow–and from them the overman. Indeed, the earth shall yet become a site of recovery! And already a new fragrance lies about it, salubrious–and a new hope! (Nietzsche, 1886/2006, p. 58).

This new environment created by the artists is full of hope and fluidity. It is a new beginning that brings into discussion the posthuman as a new species. The well-known quote by Zarathustra characterizes humanity as a bridge connecting the animal and the overhuman: "Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss… the human being is a bridge and not an end" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 7; p. 158). In Piccinini's installation, the figure of this overhuman is not depicted under the image of the "The Big Guy". It is found rather under the image of his daughter—the sculpture entitled "The Osculating Curve", 2016. As Piccinini explains:

> This leader is a kind of pusher. He wants to push science; he wants to push the body. He wants to push his vision. And he does; he does a great thing. He makes his body give birth. And he gives birth to a girl—a daughter. (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016a)

This leader is then the higher man who possessed a remarkable ability to separate pure energy and redirect it towards unconventional paths that involve science and emerging technology, and which seem surprising but inherently appropriate for the posthuman paradigm shift. Additionally, the isolated individuals symbolize, in a Sorgnerian interpretation, the societal collective. They represent the "workers," who enhance the potential for the emergence of the overhuman by providing the higher man with all the means needed to achieve this goal, while the Big Guy represents the "cultural creators": "This community consists of the few cultural creators and the many workers who supply the creators with their daily needs" (Sorgner, 2022b, p. 113). Thus, the Big Guy mirrors the "will to power" engraved in human existence and the principle of all organic lives—"life as such is will to power" (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 15). However, the daughter is the new image of the overhuman, in the form of a posthuman: "She is a great creator, and she creates these life forms, these beings that have no boundaries between them, and animals, and even things" (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016a). Under the daughter's spell the will to power moves in a further direction. She is the one who transform will to power into a general ontological principle where the organic, inorganic, and material worlds are twisted, thereby creating a new unity where "The world seen from inside, the world determined and described with respect to its 'intelligible character'—would be just this will to power and nothing else" (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 36). By reinterpreting Piccinini's story in a weak Nietzschean paradigm, this will to power as a general ontological principle in the posthuman condition—rendered under the image of the daughter (as the overhuman)—reveals that all matter is a vibrant energy imbued with unlimited potentiality to expand. In this process of permanent becoming, everything is rendered like a cycle of life as an "eternal return". Therefore, all things around her were seen as opportunities for growth and transformation in an unpredictable flow. According to Piccinini, in the daughter's hands, every object is like a seed, containing the potential for growth and nourishment (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016b). Space is not merely an empty void but a realm of development and expansion, while energy is not just a force but a luminous source of life (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016b). Shapes and structures, rather than static and fixed, are fluid, continually shifting and evolving—from seeds, fruits, and animals to minerals, machines, transgenic organisms, and complex chimeras blending organic and artificial elements (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016b). In this interconnected world, fungal growth serves as a natural recycler, decomposing waste without light, while plants harness light to convert energy into physical matter, providing sustenance for animal-pomorphic creatures (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016b). Animals enhance themselves through the assimilation of other entities, crystals form through a mysterious transformation from liquid to solid, and machines evolve by merging with organic systems for greater efficiency (Piccinini & Hennessey, 2016b). For the daughter, everything in the world is interconnected, constantly evolving, and full of potential for growth and transformation. These outcomes, in Piccinini's installation, are beyond anticipation; however, they became the mirror of the twist that intertwines the posthuman osmosis in the realm of humanimals, monsters, chimeras, and the amorphous.

In the same order of ideas, Piccinini's artwork entitled "Still Life with Stem Cells" (2002), shows the posthuman paradigm shift concerning human evolution towards the overhuman,

as the posthuman. "Still Life with Stem Cells" is not just a sculpture, but also a profound representation that highlights the fundamental capabilities of stem cells. Stem cells, known for their role as the foundational building blocks of life, possess an extraordinary capacity to differentiate and renew themselves, showcasing their inherent fluidity and the intelligence of living matter to self-organize. These stem cells emphasize the idea of life as will to power, which is an ever-changing and unpredictable cycle of generation and deterioration; where each living particle possesses an innate potential and an inherent "will" to actualize itself under the process of permanent becoming. They play a significant role in the organization and stratification of matter across various dimensions in the posthuman natural-artificial osmosis. This stratification exposes the merging points or connections between different entities (such as machinic assemblages) instead of starting with their totality (the whole that defines the parts). This approach challenges the differentiation between organic and inorganic, as well as the boundaries between nature, culture and technology. Such a non-dualistic emergent ontology, revealed by Piccinini in "Still Life with Stem Cells," shows once more that there is not a fixed, unitary, and neutral form of life in the realm of the posthuman. There is rather an interchangeable potentiality given by the variety of connections and entanglements of living matter with technology that emphasizes the inexhaustible potentiality of life itself. The depiction of these stem cells as asymmetrical fleshy masses diverges entirely from any known living organism, creating a striking and unique visual. This unfamiliarity likely triggers conflicting emotions of empathy and repulsion in the viewer during the aesthetic encounter. It suggests that every life form embodies a potentiality within the ongoing flow of becoming. It also reminds us of a particular kind of human and non-human transversal alliance that depicts that 'we,' as embodied and embedded agents, are the result of millions of cells, microbes, and bacteria that are interacting and coming together continuously in order to shape who we are (Braidotti, 2013).

At first glance, Piccinini's stem cell sculpture provokes reflections on the current landscape of biotechnological advancements, delving into the uncharted territory of life's boundless and uncertain possibilities. Simultaneously, it raises profound ethical concerns surrounding genetic technologies. However, when we explore the artist's carefully crafted world in "Still Life with Stem Cells" (2002), we can imagine how future biotechnological advancements might evolve, and how new life perspectives may arise. Such a scenario is rendered by the formless and shapeless masses distributed across the floor, embraced tenderly by the little girl. In a weak Nietzschean interpretation, this sculpture symbolizes the "three metamorphoses of the spirit" in which "the spirit becomes a camel, and the camel a lion, and finally the lion a child" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 16). Each stage is relevant in a weak Nietzschean interpretation concerning Piccinini's posthuman artistic expression. In common sense terms, the camel is often seen as an animal of burden, loaded with heavy things that it must carry: "All of these heaviest things the carrying spirit takes upon itself, like a loaded camel that hurries into the desert, thus it hurries into its desert" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 16). The stage of the metaphor of the camel symbolizes the reflection of our desertic paternalistic societies, that short circuit freedom, creativity and autonomy, being infiltrated by biased social judgments. As camels, we also bear the weight of various regulations and biases that also emerge in the realm of science and technology. These burdensome precautionary principles often hinder progress by impeding innovation. As camels, we frequently find ourselves adhering to paternalistic norms, reluctantly saying "Yes" when we truly desire to utter a resounding "No" (Ferrando, 2019, p. 49). This stage may also be associated with the Apolonian dreamworld of stasis, substance ontology, and universal values and truth. However, this stage is not a final one: "…in the loneliest desert

the second metamorphosis occurs. Here the spirit becomes lion, it wants to hunt down its freedom and be master in its own desert" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 16). This is the stage of the emergence of negative freedom, nihilism, and the Dionysian. At this phase, we say "I will"—uttering the "sacred No" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 17). In the same weak Nietzschean interpretation, it refers to integrating emerging technologies, unconventional ways of life, and differences, by accepting their place in our lives with greater openness and inclusivity, and by uttering the "sacred No" to paternalistic norms and universally valid values. However, this stage is not marked by its full potentiality or by boundless creativity, interpretation, autonomy, experimentation and relationality. It is only the stage that requires the deconstruction of old paternalistic values and norms that are symbolized by the image of the "great dragon"—" "Thou shalt" is the name of the great dragon" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 17). The final phase is symbolized by the metaphor of the child as the overhuman. This particular stage highlights the moment when individuals are receptive to various possibilities and new perspectives, thereby boosting creativity, autonomy, and freedom in all their aspects. As lions, those who declare "I will" stop contradicting their values with the commandment "Thou Shalt"; thus, they transform into children, embracing their own values for the joy of creation. This accentuates the state wherein people are open to limitless potentialities that foster their innovative capabilities because "the child—according to Nietzsche—is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying" (Nietzsche, 1883/2006, p. 17). The child joyfully exclaims the "sacred Yes" that celebrates the beauty of life and the endless potential for creation, an ongoing demonstration of pure affirmation. This is the stage in which all the fears, anxieties, and paternalistic norms regarding biotechnology and creativity (rendered by the metaphor of the 'camel' and that of the 'lion') are dispelled. Despite common misconceptions, "Still Life with Stem Cells" does not portray a dystopian or doomed world. Instead, it offers a realm where imagination, curiosity, cutting-edge technologies, and the symbol of the child as the overhuman can turn fear, repulsion, and uncertainty into something beautiful and untainted. The nonchalance with which the child cares for these lumps goes beyond bioconservatives' skepticism. Thus, by embracing this fresh viewpoint Piccinini urges us to recognize that, despite the drawbacks of genetic research, we must be willing to face the unexpected outcomes it may bring, and prioritize the inherent value of all living beings.

Conclusion

This article discusses a few of Patricia Piccinini's posthuman artworks that fall under the umbrella of a weak Nietzschean interpretation. In this paradigm, her creations delve into the realm of non-duality rendered by the process of permanent becoming, where the concept of the overhuman emerges within futuristic scenarios shaped by biotechnological advancements. Piccinini's posthuman art challenges the paternalistic norms with respect to art, science, and technology by twisting the distinctions between human and non-human, natural and artificial, organic and inorganic, and so on. Her creations seek to represent the osmosis of these elements, embracing a fluid and open approach to life and existence within the posthuman paradigm shift. Through her art, she highlights the intricate layers that make up both natural organisms and those that are genetically engineered, an aspect that emphasizes the continual variations of matter through technology. By presenting a non-dualistic worldview, she brings together elements of both order and chaos, aspects that encapsulate the Apollonian-Dionysian twist. With her hyper-realistic sculptures, she

reimagines this twist, moving beyond the confines of Greek tragedy to reveal the waves of posthuman techno-culture. These works unlock fluid networks of monsters and chimeras, symbolizing gateways to new beginnings and continual becoming.

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NIETZSCHE'S AESTHETIC PHYSIOLOGY OF ART AND POSTHUMANISM

Philipp Wolf

Abstract

Nietzsche's enthusiastic approval of self-enhancement and the "Übermensch," his epistemological perspectivism and experimental philosophy have been rightly aligned with post- and transhumanism. My paper only touches upon these points and focuses on Nietzsche's aesthetic physiology of art, which he formulates in explicit contradistinction to the dominant humanist aesthetics of "disinterested" beauty. Nietzsche deconstructs the idealist conception of the rational ego-I, and "asks" instead "the body" or "Leib," which is made up of the same affective agents or "power-quanta" as zoe, or the other-than-human. By insisting on the subconscious sensoria of the physiological "punctilios of will" ('Willens-Punktuationen') Nietzsche goes beyond the mind/body dualism and its concomitant binaries; he, moreover, unfolds an experimental and relational aesthetics of becoming as a play of "vigor and waves of vigor," of pleasure or unpleasure. In his later writings Nietzsche seems to open his aesthetics to all beings other-than-human and even the "vibrant" material world at large, it's becoming and passing away. Nietzsche thereby proposes an interpretative—non-anthropomorphic and non-exceptionalist—perspective on the physical world, which may serve, if not as a blueprint, as a discursive impulse for post-, and metahumanism.

Keywords

Nietzsche, aesthetic physiology, art, posthumanism, metahumanism.

Introduction

For Nietzsche the entire body means a sagacious open space in which art first and foremost takes effect, both in its production and reception. Nietzsche does not negate Human (self) consciousness, but clearly prioritizes the physical and redefines aesthetics in a manner which deeply impressed Modernism and Postmodernism. Yet his physiology of art must be seen as a consequence of his deconstruction of humanist philosophy and one cornerstone in his outline of an alternative relational ontology of mind and matter. Thus, Nietzsche opens varied perspectives on the physical world and aesthetics for both metahumanism and posthumanism.[1]

[1] By posthumanism I mean an approach "post" a humanist thought and practice which pivots on a normative differentiation between "we" or "I" and the other human being as well as the other-than-human world. Because of its focus on the multiplicity and plasticity of the body and ecology I also tend to metahumanism. Good discussions of the term posthumanism can be found in Ferrando (2020, pp. 54-59) et (passim); Sorgner (2022, pp. 15-23) et passim, and Wolfe (2018, pp. 356-359). Rosi Braidotti offers a cogent "conceptual foundation […] for the critical posthumanities" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 1). Stefan Sorgner (2007, 2016, 2019) has comprehensively

Before moving on to Nietzsche's physiological aesthetics, it is advisable to briefly line out the more fundamental affinities between Nietzsche and posthumanism. This is, primarily, their antagonism to the hierarchical subject-object dichotomy, which is founded on the metaphysics of reason along with the metaphysics of presence. And they both criticize the ensuing hypostatization of the human mind and the degradation of the body together with all that which is other-than-human. Clearly, the human subject-position in its normative contradistinction to the object-world is a central issue of critical posthumanism and the point of departure for a long line of other binaries.[2] The overall concern, then, is the assumed exceptionalism of "man" or, otherwise put, the de-anthropomorphizing of an environment, organic and inorganic.[3] The naturalization of the human being (and aesthetics) has wide-ranging moral and political implications. While deontological ethics becomes questionable, the horizon of possibilities opens. The liberation from binary normative restrictions allows human plasticity to unfold and individuals to transform towards other-than-human beings. Aesthetics provides a preeminent factor in this self-transformation.

There remains one fundamental methodological problem already implied in the thematic association of physiology and aesthetics. Any organic or inorganic being in and as itself is *essentially* intangible and the twitches of nerves, the movement of bowels or a pebble (*as* a pebble) on the beach are per se no art objects, unless they are highhandedly exhibited *as* art. The same is true for Nietzsche's physiological or unconscious forces and the omnipresent will-to-power. Indeed, a look into the pure processes of the creaturely down to molecules reveals nothing but a repetition of the same, self-referential procedures of expansion and contraction, contiguity and metonymy. This is already daunting enough; more frightening may be the utter amoral indifference of all organic agents. Nature remains silent about the

> "most," keeps us "far from the coils of the intestines … [A]nd woe to the calamitous curiosity which might peer just once through a crack in the chamber of consciousness and look down, and sense […] the merciless, the greedy, the insatiable […]". (Nietzsche, 1982, TL 1)[4]

No wonder Nietzsche ridiculed the Romantic-Rousseauian cult of nature (See KSA 12, p. 453; Nietzsche, 1982, Z II). His incarnation of and chiffre for "nature," Dionysos, is a suffering and "dismembered" God who represents not least the "terrors of nature" (Nietzsche, 2000, BT 9). However, what we *anthropomorphically* perceive as "terror"—the self-given auto-poietic indifference of the other-than-human to everything which is not conducive to its homeodynamics—is precisely the justification for an aesthetics of physiology or grounding of art in physiology. *Physis* in the *classical* (and not the physicalistic)

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dealt with the affinities between Nietzsche and Trans- or Posthumanism. His focus is on Nietzsche's significant subjects "overman," "enhancement," and "perspectivism," not treated in the present essay.

[2] Braidotti re-defines subjectivity as "an expanded self, whose relational capacity is not confined within the human species […]." Her systematic reference is "Zoe, the non-human, vital force of life"—in the vein of Spinoza and Deleuze (Braidotti, 2018, p. 11). The "vital force of life" is also an, if all-inclusive, Nietzschean category.

[3] De-anthropomorphizing the organic and inorganic world *and* refraining from a physical-mechanistic reduction appears to pose a fundamental problem for Nietzsche and his exegetes. His "Will to Power" and panpsychism (Nietzsche, 2000, BGE, 36) which preside over and permeate everything, are anthropological, psychological and moreover metaphysical categories. Nietzsche seems to take account of this by couching his conjectures in terms of "a counterfactual thought experiment" (Loeb, 2015, p. 81).

[4] There is only an abridged version of TL in *The Portable Nietzsche* (Kaufmann, Trans.). Other passages of this text, which are not in this edition, have been translated from the original German (as indicated).

sense is the "guarantor of an existence which does not submit to reification; therefore, it is respected as the bodily ground for ecstasy" (Sloterdijk, 1986, p. 123). Ecstasy is, as we shall see, a temporary precondition of art. If artist and recipient assimilate *to* the suchness of the given materiality (including their bodies) which precedes and succeeds their instrumental intervention, an unbiased appreciation of the other may occur. And finally, if perpetual contiguity or metonymy come down to the "insufferableness" of "pure presence" (Sloterdijk, 1986, p. 148), we still have "art to not die of the truth" (KSA 13, p. 500). Human language, abstracting as it is, offers nevertheless the metaphoric as-if, a medium of transfer between body and art. 'Art' is a culturalistic concept. But without this contrivance, we are left with physiology, that is, mere processes which induce a feeling of comfort or discomfort. The eventual compromise, then, is a work of art that feels and resonates like something physical, which is yet an abstracted and generalized form: an iridescent amalgam of *ecstasis* and *stasis*.

Consciousness, Reason, and Binarism

For Nietzsche the terms (self-)consciousness, reason or the human "I" are often used synonymously.[5] This is consistent since the subject-position or synthetic concept of "I" (for Kant the condition of coherent experience) is derived from and justified by transcendental reason. Since Parmenides the functional purpose of reason has been the determination of identity or unity in its interrelation between the subject-"I" and the object-other. To ascribe properties or predicates to both subjects and objects, they must be conceived of as something uniform withdrawn from the vicissitudes of temporality.[6] Aristotelian logic (with its principles of identity or excluded middle) proved very efficacious to this effect, so did Kant's transcendental epistemology. Even more determinant for Nietzsche was language. Its grammar (subject-object-predicate, tense, mode, causation etc.) was central to anchor the idea of a sovereign ego in human minds, justifying accordingly the concept "being". In fact, we are conditioned by "a prejudice in favour of reason" which proves

> a rude fetishism when we call to mind the basic prepositions of the metaphysics of language – which is to say, of *reason*. It is *this* which sees everywhere deed and doer; this which believes in will as cause in general; this which believes in the 'ego,' in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and which projects its belief in the ego-substance on to all things – only thus does it create the concepts 'thing.'[…] Being is everywhere thought in, foisted on, as cause … (Nietzsche, 1990, TI 5, "'Reason' in Philosophy")

We cannot, however, escape synthetic judgements nor our language they are inevitable.[7] "The fundamental errors of reason …" are "petrified in language" (GM I 13); rational thought is ineluctably "interpretation according to a scheme" (KSA 12, p. 149). Indeed, without language, we would not be conscious of ourselves. It is not something, though, that

[5] For a good overview see Dries (2018b), particularly pp. 1-2.

[6] See Nietzsche (1962), "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks," 10.

[7] For Nietzsche reflexive consciousness and synthetic judgements are necessary in the "perspective optics of life" (Nietzsche, 2000, BGE 11), but they cannot claim a special ontological status. Nietzsche deals with the cognitive circularity resulting from anthropomorphization by theoretically assuming an analogy between inside and outside *and* the principal, but reflected and tentative, legitimacy of any perspective on the outside.

justifies our moral high ground: "consciousness in general has developed only under the pressure of the need to communicate." The deficient human animal "required help," had to express its needs to survive. Self-consciousness (not the "driving … force" (GS 360) within the body) and "communication-signs" co-emerged in the "social animal," necessary, as they were, for "community and herd" (GS 354). Nietzsche thereby anticipates another posthuman basic idea: language and reason are pragmatic-adaptive tools to compensate for deficiencies (as against other species) which emerged in the process of evolution. For Nietzsche, self-conscious "Man" "is not just an individual, but rather the whole organic ensemble of one particular line that continues to live" (KSA 12, p. 251; also quot. and transl. by Abel, 2015, p. 40). The human mind is only a processual step in a continuous differentiation of the organic world "from the most extreme limit of the inorganic" (Abel, 2015, p. 40). As this requires "continuous interpretation processes" (KSA 12, p. 140), the entire organic world must be endued with some assessing intelligence and sentience. Accordingly, the evolutionary organic sphere found it pertinent to equip "Man" with the tool of reason. Both therefore, "the pre-conscious mental realm and the organic realm have a strong and pre-formative impact on explicitly conscious mental states and processes" (Abel, 2015, p. 41). The immanent relationality between the organic (and inorganic) and the human self is of paramount importance for an inclusive posthuman aesthetics.

Humans are nonetheless prosthetic beings, and their prostheses cannot make up for the "regulating, unconscious […] drives" (Nietzsche, 2000, GM II 16). Consciousness, as regards the whole of life, is not only "superfluous" (like other animals we could still think, act without reflection), it is dangerous because it has come to distinguish between subject and object and a thing in itself and appearance. It takes, moreover, as real, true and substantial what is only "a surface- and sign-world." Everything becomes thereby corrupted; things are made "universal and common" (Nietzsche, 1981a, GS 354, my transl.). Under the self-delusion of our conceptual language, we equate "what is unequal. No leaf ever wholly equals another, and the concept 'leaf' is formed through an arbitrary abstraction from individual differences" (Nietzsche, 1982, TL 1).

Conceptual consciousness does not do justice to the becoming individuality[8] of the environmental multifariousness. It offers a reductive and subject-centered perspective of the world, which comes down to a reification of the fluid self-transformation of the given. This is another point, Nietzsche shares with critical posthumanism and metahumanism. Both are concerned with the ecological acknowledgment of the specificity, difference, *and* becoming of each entity, animate or inanimate. And life is for both an ontic mode of many faceted experiences which precede all binary categories of rational and irrational. The insistence on a binary logic, especially the law of the excluded middle/third along with the principle of contradiction, proves incompatible with dynamic and interactive processes. Binarism is the more irreconcilable with the production and reception of art in its irreducible (sensory, sensuous, affective, plastic etc.) ambiguity and indeterminateness.

"Power-Quanta": Nietzsche's Fundamental Ontology and Art

However, the "Ego" relies only on "[y]our small reason" and forms an insignificant subdivision of the self in comparison to the "great reason" of the "body" (Nietzsche, 1982, Z I, see also KSA 10, p. 7). Nietzsche does not introduce another dichotomy, reversing the Cartesian hierarchy. Instead, he imagines the body as a holistic and self-referential integrity

[8] Surely, reconciling permanent change and individuality poses a certain logically challenge.

in its continuous relationality with its animate and inanimate environment, which is not conceived of in terms of static thing-entities, but "by the figure of highly complex, dynamic, reciprocal effects of numerous 'living' and 'intelligent' organizations of force" (Abel, 2015, p. 42). Subject to the will-to-power, these forces undergo processes of self-overcoming and incorporation, resistance, suffering and reproduction. In his rejection of the mechanistic world picture, he replaces the unit of an atom with what he calls "power-quanta." A power-quantum is not imaginable as a static object, but only through its dynamics, the "effect it exercises, and it resists" (KSA 13, p. 258). Power-quanta only exist in and through their relationality, "their relational tension to all other dynamic quanta … from this pathos only emerges a becoming, an operation" (KSA 13, p. 259). The agonistic interaction between mastery and demise is the rationally incomprehensible ground of all.[9] Nietzsche, interestingly enough, conceives of those quanta as at the basis of both the organic and inorganic environment and more importantly as fundamentally animate agents, whose impetus is to thrive and reproduce or vanish and who even have a proactive perception (see also KSA 11, p. 654). Indeed, like many Romantics, Nietzsche comes close to a panpsychism,[10] which purports "[t]he conjunction of the organic and the inorganic" (KSA 11, p. 623), and therefore, also a gradual but omnipresent sentience on the basic level of the constituents of the latter: "The impact of one atom on the other, presupposes sentience" (KSA 7, p. 469). This means, according to Ulfers and Cohen, that all "world events" are not only "objects" but also "subjects of experience" (2018, p. 146). The small particles of matter, events *and* objects, are autopoietic and nevertheless manifestations (not causal effects) of the "interpreting" and all-pervasive will-to-power, which we all share to certain degrees.[11] The characteristic quality of those dynamic entities or "Willensatome[n]" (KSA 7, p. 215) is that they are all "entangled, ensnared, enamored" (Nietzsche, 1982, Z IV, 10), and at the same time discreet or singular. The "dynamic time-point" (which is identical with the "sensation-point") acts in distance, "each effect is actio in distans." If they were "sequential," Nietzsche finds, they would collapse into one another (KSA 7, pp. 578-579).[12]

Nietzsche's fundamental ontology with its panpsychist reverberations (and anticipation of modern quantum theory) is relevant to both an advanced anti-humanist aesthetic and posthumanism.[13] It embeds the human body in and on a par with everything that is not human. A refined physical exteroception in combination with a fine-grained interoception—as the principal aesthetic/aisthetic attitude—may then give us an inkling of what affects us all individually and in general. We may develop a deep sensibility for a common sentience down to the foundations of being. If, on the other hand, all being is endowed with "existential sensuousness" we must attribute artistic capabilities to everything that is (Reschke, 2011, p. 34).

[9] Nietzsche's power-quanta should be imagined in the Aristotelian metaphysical sense of *dynamis* or (lat.) *potentia*, i.e. "real potential" which underlies all agents and beings. "Power is anything, which produces or can in some way produce effects; but it is not yet the effect itself" (Gerhardt, 2006, p. 189).

[10] I rely here on two informative articles about Nietzsche's panpsychism by Ulfers and Cohen (2018) and Loeb (2015). Nietzsche himself does not use the term.

[11] The ontological consistency of the organic and inorganic can also be deduced from an early note 1872/3: "All inorganic matter arises from organic matter" (KSA 7, p. 554). Later Nietzsche claims that there "is no inorganic world" (KSA 11, p. 504), given the "leading" omnipresence of the will-to-power.

[12] This seems implausible within the thought-system of traditional physics of temporal continuity. But it anticipates postmodern physics, particularly loop quantum theory "in which the structure of both space and time come in discreet components" (Ulfers & Cohen, 2018, p. 155).

[13] Nietzsche's ontology also anticipates what Rosi Braidotti calls a "zoe-centered egalitarianism" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 60).

Nietzsche himself draws an analogy between his fundamental ontology and art. By virtue of an all-pervading "pathos" and "agon" (the interpreting will-to-power), individual objects and events come into being autopoietically: "The world as a work of art which gives birth to itself" (KSA 12, p. 119). Or similarly: "One must understand the fundamental artistic phenomenon, which is called life – the constructing spirit … it sustains itself" (KSA 11, p.129). "Life" and "world" create themselves and keep themselves aesthetically alive. To quote again Günter Abel: "With the definition of the world as the multifarious play of forces which live out of themselves and return to themselves," it has "an exclusively physical and aesthetic meaning" (Abel, 1984, p. 369).

The identification of the world or life at large with art can be taken as the linchpin of Nietzsche's physiological aesthetics: If we assume that the material universe "out there" consists of sentient relational and pluripotent (autopoietic) agents that have a gradual ability to differentiate—"holding the same rank of reality as our affect possesses" (Nietzsche, 2000, BGE 36)— if we, accordingly, assume that our bodies are likewise assembled of power quanta (with a palpable and sensible capability of differentiation) and permeated by the correlating drives of the will-to-power, an inclusive and egalitarian posthuman aesthetics of becoming becomes apparent. In other words, a perspective which sees the world as populated with materials, subjects, things or entities with a certain horizon of experience will change our own ways of aesthetic perceptions fundamentally. In art we witness *and* experience the same self-sustaining and auto-poietic processes as in vital life; art itself is a manifestation of the will-to-power. If, conversely, we give ourselves to the other in a sensitive way we may well have an aesthetic experience.

Aesthetics and the Body

The problem that comes to the fore is the perception and communication of those "entangled" and "enamored" forces by the cerebral human being. Normally, humans are unable to sense the smaller ramifications of matter. How, then, to break open the ego-centered subjectivity of *homo sapiens* and do justice to the fine-grained materiality of beings? Ego-consciousness and its language along with its cognitive sensorium are structurally inapt to communicate the very abundance of the world. By focusing on ourselves we may perceive our breathing, heartbeat, the tonus of our nerves and call it mindfulness. But this remains an ego-subjective activity without onto-epistemological consequences. The Indo-Germanic languages of presence are inherently construed to perpetuate and fix what is always "becoming." The Nietzschean aporia is that this "coming-into-being," or "fluid form" (KSA 5, p. 315) of life, is also only discursively describable by means of a concept, namely "becoming". "It is not at our discretion to change our means of expression …" (KSA 13, p. 302). Yet Nietzsche is adamant. In 1883 he writes: "I have always striven to prove to me the innocence of becoming, … which refers to the future of humanity" (KSA 10, pp. 237-238). The programmatic pathway he takes is "to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life" (Nietzsche, 2000, BT 2, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism"). If science is "stretched to its limits" it is art "which breaks out; art gets its way where knowledge consumes itself" (KSA 10, p. 239). Art can bring to bear multiple and ever-changing perspectives, discursive language, reason and science are incapable of. Art, in contrast, is processual, indeterminate, individual, and open: "work in progress" (Reschke, 2015, p. 34; KSA 7, p. 13).

As opposed to the idealist tradition, Nietzschean aesthetics fosters both an existential and psychosomatic experience. In the classical "'beautiful in itself'" he sees only "a figment

of the imagination, like all of idealism." Aesthetics, in contrast, "is indissolubly tied to […] biological prepositions" (Nietzsche, 2000, CW, Epilogue). He rejects (Christian-Platonic) guilt, causality, and proposes an "[a]esthetic justification of being" (KSA 10, p. 238), which means that the criteria for the valuation of being should be physiological, life-affirming or life-negating. Therefore, art as applied physiology overcomes the distinction between reception and production and becomes a biological, although intentional, category whose value derives from either the enhancement of cenesthesia and vitality or, negatively, anesthesia and waning vitality: "Aesthetic wellbeing is biological wellbeing" (KSA 13, p. 511).

Wellbeing is first signaled by the whole body. Thus, Nietzsche follows the "guidance of the body" (KSA 11, p. 249, KSA 12, passim). The body acts intuitively and spontaneously according to affects, subcutaneous impulses and a non-normative subjectivity, divested of synthetic judgements. As already suggested, for Nietzsche the human body (the cortex included) is naturally governed and motivated by the same principles as the conjoint organic and inorganic world, that is, by the relational and hardly settleable will-to-power and non-solid elementary agents. This also means that "interpretation … as a form of the will-to-power" has a processual and affective being, which operates independently of and prior to its reflection in the ego-subject (KSA 12, p. 140). In fact, what humans and other species do, perceive, feel etc. is concomitant with a permanently flowing process of "realizations of power" (KSA 11, pp. 560-561):

> The human body ("Leib") in which all of the furthest and nearest past of all organic becoming comes alive and corporeal ("leibhaft"), and through which, over, and beyond, a tremendous inaudible stream seems to flow: the body is a more astonishing thought than the old 'soul'. (KSA 11, p. 565)

Given the integrative (and self-organizing) understanding of an embedded body, it becomes an existential, a "Leib," which I do not *have*, but which I *am* individually.[14]

Physiological *Ai*sthetics and Art

The body, as "Leib" in an aesthetic state, is the more so a "great reason" since it proves a non-categorizing registry of the most differentiated sensory experiences and impressions of the animate and inanimate world. Nietzsche is critical of an idealist concept of sensualism, but Nietzsche, the phenomenalist, accepts it "as a regulative hypothesis, if not as a heuristic principle" (Nietzsche, 2000, BGE 212). Consequently, he takes recourse to the German aesthetician Johan Gottlieb Baumgarten (KSA 12, p. 363; Baumgarten had elaborated on the classical theory of *aisthesis*, that is, of sensory perception in 1750). The "senses," as opposed to the falsifying reason, "show becoming, passing away, change, they do not lie" (Nietzsche, 1990, TI 2, "'Reason' in Philosophy"). The noumenal sense (singular) is supplanted (epistemologically and physically) by numerous sensory perspectives: "It is our desires which interpret the world […] . Each drive has lust for power, each with its own perspective" (KSA 12, p. 315, see also KSA 11, pp. 587-588).

[14] It should not go unmentioned that in *Zarathustra* Nietzsche introduces the "Self," which is closely connected with the body in its entirety. It acts as a mediator between bodily forces and consciousness, "The self also seeks with the eyes of the senses; it also listens with the ears of the spirit" (Nietzsche, 1982, Z I).

In a state of refined sentience, the somatic system of affects provides *autopoietically* the corresponding and adequate perspective (KSA 12, p. 342). Thus, the aesthetic act is referred back to the "self-experience of the organizing performances of life" (Gerhardt, 1984, p. 391). Only thus we might be able to get a non-restrictive idea of the "subject as a manyness" (KSA 11, p. 650), of power-quanta as they emerge and die in their "determining of their fluid boundaries of powe." The main thing is

> that we understand the master and his subjects as of the same kind, all as feeling, willing, thinking – and that, from everywhere where we see and guess motion in the body, we learn to infer a related and invisible life. Movement is symbolism for the eye, it points to the fact that something has been felt, willed and thought. (KSA 11, p. 638f.)

In the physical sphere a permanent change takes place, a shifting of unconscious perceptions and sensory expressions and perspectives. When receiving or producing art there are many pre-reflexive and affective motions involved. When we read a poem, watch a play, even look at a painting, we are often mimetically involved in the processual flow or manifestation of the work. We gesture, we mime, our facial features express excitement or dismay, we follow the lines, whisper unwittingly.

Corporeality: Dionysian Ecstasy

On these grounds, physiological aesthetics is best achieved by an initial abandonment of the self to a Dionysian ecstasy, which means a stepping out of one's ego-identity, an arousal and intensification

> of the entire affect system […] so that it discharges all its powers of representation, imitation, transfiguration, transmutation, every kind of mimicry and playacting, conjointly. The essential thing remains the facility of the metamorphosis, the incapacity *not* to react. (Nietzsche, 1990, TI 10, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man")

Rather than the drunkenness of the mythical deity, Nietzsche has an oversensitive and highly excitable nerve system in mind which is capable of perceiving and distinguishing a "thousandfold complexity" (KSA 13, p. 329). Dionysian artists naturally pass into an ecstatic state to mimetically "metamorphose" or assimilate to or into the other. *They are incapable of not responding*. Due to a vast amount of sensory input and neural stimuli and by way of proprioception the subjects are incorporated into a psychosomatic commotion. Nietzsche even equates the powers which take effect in the "conception of art" with those in a "sexual act": "It is one and the same power" (KSA 13, p. 600).[15] By giving oneself to these ecstatic affects and drives one gives up the ingrained compulsion to act consciously and intentionally. A "reaction," albeit *without* interference, is the motive behind physiological aesthetics: not the ego-subject is to realize herself first, but the other of his or her nature.

Subjects are drawn into the relationality of the Self with its other, blurring thereby the subject-object duplicity. One experiences oneself as gliding between the poles (as in mystic

[15] Lots of modernist artists followed Nietzsche in this respect. One of Nietzsche's references was Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres ("Raphael and the Baker' s Daughter").

states of flow). The artistic body is not fixed in a static being but progresses as a Heraclitean plural being. Since their perspectives are innumerable and dynamic, "involving indefinite interpretations," and since there is no physical or ontological difference between inside and outside, the world has become once again "infinite" (Nietzsche, 2000, BGE 374). The artist is most open to the plethora of interpreting and interpreted centers of force, her field of bodily experimentation embraces the "punctilios of will" emerging from his "physical vigour" (KSA 13, p. 36f.); like the ancient mimos "he enters into every skin, into every emotion; he is continually transforming himself" (Nietzsche, 1990, TI 10, "Expeditions").

In his later writings the mimetic self-transgression and open experiment become the leading motive of his Dionysian utopia. He explicitly extends the force of art to animals, merges art with love and celebrates art emphatically:

> Here we find art as an organic function couched in the most angelic instinct of life, we find art as the greatest stimulant of life. […] It suspends even all values. The lover is worth more, stronger. In animals this state sprouts new substances, pigments, colours, and forms: most of all new movements, new rhythms, new luring tunes and seductions. It is not different with humans. […] If we subtract from poetry in tune and word the suggestion of that intestinal fever: what remains of poetry and music? (KSA 13, p. 299-10)

Mimetic Transmutation

How does the enthused artist, "overladen with energy" (Nietzsche, 1990, TI 9, "Expeditions"), bring about art? How do they realize which of the ever-changing perspectives might prove a life-enhancing transmutation? Art as physiology proceeds, in contrast to the classicistic tradition, without strict formal and constricting reservations (it is therefore difficult to maintain the binarism of Dionysos and Apollo). The artist lets oneself in for an open "experimentation with the elementary data of being," which is "the condition for an unvoluntary unleashing of significance as such" (Lypp, 1984, p. 368). Rather than on transfiguration, the later Nietzschean artist relies on a productive physiological biofeedback and the ensuing possibilities for a transgression of culturally sanctioned perspectives. "The man (sic!) in this condition transforms things until they mirror his power – until they are reflections of his perfection. This *compulsion* to transform into the perfect is – art" (Nietzsche, 1990, TI 9, "Expeditions"). The "perfection" is not a willful creation of his or her intellect, but the "mirror" or representation of the organic autopoiesis he has experienced[16] (Menke, 2008, p. 112). The artist senses a life-enhancing motion, a stimulating physiological power to correspondingly transfer this into an adequate form. She perfectly transforms what has occurred to her. The artist forsakes for the time being instrumental reason and purposeful action. She is "incapable of not reacting," and thus reflects or communicates the greater wisdom of the body. The point is to tie in with the physical and general being of life and transform this being into an image or sculpture—without an a priori differentiation and single-minded anticipation of the result.

In Nietzsche's notes we find a remarkable passage which backs up epistemologically the facility of an aesthetic abandonment to the sensory perception. Nietzsche assumes the

[16] It should be reemphasized that Nietzsche does not reduce aesthetic experience to a positivistic biologism; organic processes are rather interpreted in the perspective of a felt affirmation and enhancement of life and will to power.

prereflexive priority of (thereby a non-categorial possibility of access to) the transforming outer world: "The world of appearance appears to us as a *cause only after it has acted,* and the effect was processed. This means that we continuously reverse the order of what happens" (KSA 11, p. 437). The recipient's body had been acted upon by sensory stimuli and changed in accordance with the environment before consciousness has started to categorize it. In "Truth and Lie" Nietzsche had already rejected the idea of a "causality" or "correctness" between subject and object. Rather, he claims, there is "at most an aesthetic attitude, I mean, a suggestive transference or stammering translation into an entirely foreign language, for which one needs, in any case, a freely poeticizing freely inventive medial sphere and mediating force" (Nietzsche, 1981b, TL 1, my transl.). The intermediary in this "aesthetic relation" is, as we shall see, metaphor.

What matters is the dynamic indeterminateness of the "aesthetic state". The "corporeal vigor" (KSA 12, 393) proves the "stimulant of life" (KSA 13, 194, 288) in the *passive-active* coping with a plethora of significance (drives, instincts, vibes). By suspending a willful intrusion into the flow of becoming and embracing the experience of contingency the "reason of the body" forms in and for itself "communicative units" (Gerhardt, 1984, p. 392; Wolf, 1993, p. 72).

By virtue of a mimetic impulse artists manage to cast the becoming and "interpreting" will-to-power into material form. Modern artists realize themselves by disappearing as empirical subjects in self-referential and hermetic projections of the imaginary, which burgeon in many perspectives. They feel into themselves, act intuitively and spontaneously to simultaneously develop a sensuous and em-pathic relation to the material they sensorily encounter. The artist then perceives an individual fulfillment of the general will to power, while the state of exception enables her to turn things into a reflection of their own fullness and perfection.

Practices

Nietzschean *ai*sthetics assumes an ontological equivalence of the human- and the other-than-human world. It thereby also anticipates the expansion of the materials modern art employs, including all kinds of organic and inorganic substances as well as an unbound language. It allows for land-art, bio-art and even conceptional art. Impressionism, Pointillism, or Neo-Expressionism may well be interpreted as expressions of Nietzsche's "punctilios of will". Nietzsche was indeed a leading and acknowledged figure for modern and postmodern artists, including the "Dionysian" painter André Masson, the physiological painter Francis Bacon (see his *Triptychs*) and the Fluxus (!) and Action-artist Joseph Beuys (a humanist and posthumanist figure, who closely communed with animals and elementary matter). For Tyyne Claudia Pollmann ("Nietzsche bynite & transfigure Nietzsche"), a medic, concept, media and performance artist, Nietzsche serves as a major inspiration.[17]

In literary art, poets, in an impassioned Dionysian state, give themselves to the sensuous materiality of language, its condensations and mimetic qualities. They ride on the "carriage of rhythm" (Nietzsche, 1909, Human 189), slide on the signifier, communicating the floating "punctilios of will" (KSA 13, pp. 36-37): poetry is "the continuation of the mythical drive" (KSA 7, p. 439). Nietzsche, in his Zarathustra, late fragments and poems, particularly the Dionysus-Dithyrambs, does this with many predications, with narrative set pieces, mythologems and a highly dramatic and energetic diction, and more so, through fragments

[17] For an overview see Straka & Gorka-Reimus, 2001.

and silence, indicated by punctuation. Nietzsche conveys an "attunement" to impart the unspeakable Dionysian state.

The transformational link between the Dionysian body and poetry is metaphor, which carries the "symbolic world of affects" (KSA 7, 365). Modern humans, Nietzsche notes, have forgotten themselves as "artistically creating subjects" and suppress the "primitive world of metaphors." Anxiously, they 'freeze' "the original mass of images which stream forth in a fiery liquid from their primal faculty of imagination." The poetic "intellect," in contrast, a

> master of dissimulation, […] celebrates its Saturnalia […] with creative pleasure by jumbling up the metaphors and shifting the boundary stones of abstractions, so that, for example, it denotes the stream as the moving path which carries people to places they otherwise walk to (Nietzsche 1981b, TL 2, my transl.).

A strong feeling of elation sets in with the immediate outflow of "new transferences, metaphors and metonymies" (Nietzsche, 1981b, TL 2, my transl.): "The aesthetic state has an overabundance of means of communication, together with an extreme receptivity for stimuli and signs – it is the source of languages" (KSA 13, p. 296). The bodily system of affects and "neural stimuli" transforms itself in an outpour of images beyond abstraction; the bodily exuberance shoots in a "hundred of linguistic devices" (KSA 13, p. 356).

The plastic and visual artists become absorbed in the "contemplation of images" (Nietzsche, 2000, BT 5), but they are no less physiologically innervated when receiving/producing a sculpture or painting. Music may completely mesmerize the listener: The "aesthetic state" is the source of "the tonal languages, as well as the sign- or gesture- and eye-language" (KSA 13, pp. 296-297). The artist abandons his affective perspective mimetically to the stone, bronze and tune to feel and sense the experience of the material in question. Nietzsche was highly interested in animal mimicry. Artists and recipients undergo similar processes, that is, they merge for the time being with the other. The subject disappears for a moment in the surface structure of the stony Greek statue to experience its *energeia* through and in their bodily biofeedback. When Nietzsche watches a Greek sculpture, he feels the resonance of the Greek agon, which is contained and absorbed in the apollonian stillness of the torso[18]—to nevertheless transcend into an adequate image.

Nietzsche's postromantic enthusiasm about the reconciling force of Dionysian art never abated: "Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man" (Nietzsche, 2000, BT 1). By forsaking the willful interference into the becoming of the other, the experience of art may teach us that humans and others are essentially (or ontologically) on a par, equivalent and coequal.

Conclusion

The ontological affinities between Nietzsche and (critical) post- or metahumanism are obvious. Nietzsche's refutation of the subject-object dualism, his aesthetic questioning of instrumental reason and his insistence on the vital multiplicity of the human bios, along with

[18] "Figures in a relief make such a strong impression on the imagination because they seem in the act of emerging from the wall and only stopped by some sudden hindrance" (Human I, 177). For Nietzsche and plastic art see Babich (2021).

its relational integration into *zoe* are indicative of new evolutionary possibilities. A good posthuman example is Jane Bennett's affective "thing-power materialism," ascribing an emancipatory function to material agents. Bennett emphasizes the "powers of life, resistance and even a kind of will" of things, organic or inorganic (Bennett, 2004, p. 360). *Vibrant Matter* (Bennett, 2010)[19] and *Influx & Efflux* (Bennett, 2020) are about the subliminal material effects and affects that cancel out traditional dichotomies, flow sustainably into, through, and out of our bodily beings. The latter book, interestingly enough, has an aesthetic focus, namely on Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

Metahumanism, building on critical posthumanism, pursues "a relational ontology of becoming" (del Val, 2020, p. 3). Jaime del Val and Stefan Sorgner (in their "Metahumanist Manifesto") describe (and proclaim) "the body as [a] field of relational forces" (Sorgner, 2022, p. 26). The performative artists Jaime del Val, Stelarc, or Damien Hirst are probably the best known to work with bodies, their relational becoming and passing away. Even if Nietzsche was not averse to technology (he enjoyed his typewriter), it should be difficult to reconcile Nietzsche with technological versions of Posthumanism; his psycho-somatic approach appears incompatible with techno- or bio art (of e.g. Eduardo Kac). Nietzsche's programmatic "Innocence of Becoming" (KSA 10, pp. 237-238) means, after all, to become (like) children again, and to give themselves to the dynamic-creative powers of their "own being" (see Gerhardt, 2006, p. 153). It is doubtful whether he would want to spare human beings the efforts and courage of cultural self-formation and self-conquest.[20]

The recent wave of Immersive Art may well be another instance of the relevance of Nietzschean aesthetics. Immersive Art tries to holistically embrace the entire physical human in all their senses without anaesthetization.[21] Indeed, a refined focus on and practice of sensory perception (proprioception, interoception, exteroception) would not only broaden posthuman perspectives, it would also give us a better understanding of the other, and ourselves.

Finally, one possible objection: Nietzsche's account of the vibrations that emerge between a human "Leib," the "punctilios of will," other things, and particularly art, may appear rather esoteric. If so, it is worth looking at the recent studies in the phenomenology of atmosphere by Tonino Griffero (2023) or Gernot Böhme (2018). A quote by the phenomenologist Heidegger (from his book on Nietzsche) must do: "In each bodily state resonates and covibrates each time a mode, tune or air of how we respond, or not, to the things around and the people with us" (Heidegger, 1961 I, 118; see also KSA 12, p. 556).

[19] In *Vibrant Matter* she deals with Nietzsche's dietary recommendations (pp. 43-48).
[20] See, however, Sorgner, 2016, p. 124. The pertinent debate is still open.
[21] Elsewhere I have elaborated on a posthuman aesthetics of Immersive Art (Wolf, 2024).

* Nietzsche's unpublished fragments are referred to as KSA plus number of volume and page number: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden (1980). Eds. G. Colli. and M. Montinari. de Gruyter. All translations are mine.
* Nietzsche's works, published in his lifetime, have been quoted (by abbreviation and section) from the easily accessible editions below:

Abbreviations:

The Antichrist (A)
The Birth of Tragedy (BT)
The Case of Wagner (CW)
On the Genealogy of Morals (GM)
The Gay Science (GS)
Kritische Studienausgabe (KSA)
Human All-Too-Human (Human)
Twilight of the Idols (TI)
On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense (TL)
Zarathustra (Z)

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PART II.

Nietzsche, Sorgner, and Transhumanism

OVERCOMING THE TRANSHUMAN CONDITION: IS IT POSSIBLE TO PHILOSOPHICALLY ENHANCE TRANSHUMANISM?

Nicolás Rojas-Cortés

Abstract

One of the core projects of transhumanism is to enhance ourselves in order to overcome the limits of the human condition. The implementation of strategies that could effectively assist in this endeavor requires broad interdisciplinary knowledge, primarily concerning cutting-edge technologies. However, it is valid to ask: Is it possible to conceive of transhumanism without a coherent philosophy? It seems to us that this is indeed the case when one speaks of classic transhumanism and characterizes the proposals of N. Bostrom and M. More as incoherent. In general, one of the main reasons for these critiques lies in the claim that the ontology behind their projects is naturalistic, yet at the same time, they propose the possibility of an unlimited existence. Under what philosophical assumptions would it be possible to postulate something like this? In what ontological conception would an unlimited existence be possible and for whom would this phenomenon be possible? In our view, the ways in which transhumanism answers these questions can be described as capitalist realism following Mark Fisher. This means that, on the one hand, their proposals are inconsistent with their own presuppositions nor with any understanding of truth and, on the other hand, who assume that there is no alternative for understanding existence other than their own. We describe this as the classical transhuman condition. Assuming that philosophy is progressing and that there are new ways of conceiving the relationship between transhumanism and philosophy, we ought to ask: Is it possible to submit transhumanism to philosophical enhancement?

Keywords

Classic transhumanism, philosophy, capitalist realism, philosophical enhancement, twisting transhumanism.

Introduction

Discussing what transhumanism is involves examining the ideas that transhumanist spokespersons presuppose when proposing strategies for overcoming the human condition. In this sense, not all transhumanist spokespersons share the same ideas or approaches to achieving a posthuman existence. A key challenge for the transhumanist movement is aligning the coherence of its assumptions with the goals it seeks to accomplish.

The book *Metahumanism, Euro-Transhumanism and Sorgner's Philosophy. Technology, Ethics, Art* (2024) edited by Aura Elena Schussler and Maurizio Balistreri has made possible a discussion that allows us to continue investigating how to precisely define the different types of transhumanism. Notably, Stefan L. Sorgner (2024) has engaged in debates with thinkers

like John Danaher (2024) and Steve Fuller (2024)—the latter being one of the most influential representatives of transhumanism—regarding how Sorgner's version of transhumanism should be understood.

For Danaher, "transhumanists should embrace ethical objectivism, optimism and utopianism" (2024, p. 205), while for Fuller, Sorgner's proposal "still treats immortality as a purely theological concept, even if it periodically resurfaces in modern secular science" (2024, p. 218). In contrast, *We have always been cyborgs* (2022b) and *Philosophy of Posthuman Art* (2022a) propose a form of transhumanism that does not presuppose a correspondence theory of truth or the possibility of an immortal existence and, consequently, does not express favorable views on utopias. This discrepancy between presuppositions and goals led Sorgner to label his proposal as Euro-transhumanism to differentiate it from classic transhumanism.

We believe Sorgner's differentiation is valid, as his project incorporates its philosophical presuppositions and proposes goals consistent with them. For instance, immortality is not the goal, but rather the rational and democratic use of data. The characteristics mentioned by Danaher and Fuller can be associated with the *transhuman condition*, that is, with the existential and philosophical project classic transhumanists aim to achieve. The most sincere expression of this phenomenon can be seen in the proposals of Max More and Nick Bostrom, who, despite More's attempt to create his own form of transhumanism—i.e., extropianism—shaped classic transhumanism.

This text aims to show how classic transhumanism presents a naïve and incoherent understanding of its philosophical presuppositions and the practical goals it seeks to accomplish. The combination of ontological materialism with optimism regarding the supposedly infinite possibilities of science allows classic transhumanism to be described as a utopia attainable only for the privileged in the first world. In this sense, the pursuit of utopia implies assuming that there are infinite resources available to generate a posthuman existence.

Therefore, the guiding question for this section is: who can achieve posthumanity? The answer suggests that achieving posthumanity would mean extending a life of privilege currently accessible only to a small, privileged sector of humanity. Consequently, transhumanism effectively seeks technological immortality only for those who can afford a ticket to utopia. We refer to these characteristics as the *transhuman condition* presupposed in classic transhumanism.

In the next section, classic transhumanism will be analyzed through the question: why would it be good to become posthuman? The commitment of this form of transhumanism to the concept of the "good" is reduced to individual, rather than communal, well-being. This is why we interpret this classic form of the movement as another expression of "capitalist realism," following Mark Fisher. It imposes an "ontology of business," supported by a techno-optimistic project of unlimited progress, without considering the possibility of critiquing its own presuppositions. The concept of the "good" is reduced to an individualistic hedonism accessible only to a few. Why invest cutting-edge technology in solving global problems like access to drinking water when it is possible for some people in the first world to have more and better experiences? The answer would be that, in a world where capitalist realism exhausts all the boundaries of what is thinkable, it becomes impossible to question whether other ways of conceiving the "good" exist. Thus, classic transhumanism is presented as another culturally specific project incapable of engaging in dialogue with other realities.

Finally, acknowledging that different philosophical presuppositions lead to different practical consequences, we present the original thought of Stefan L. Sorgner—Euro-transhumanism. If we have always been cyborgs, because an ontology of permanent becoming is accepted, then it is unnecessary to strive for a posthuman existence, as we have always been in this state. In this sense, Sorgner weakens (*indebolimento*) the presuppositions of transhumanism and posthumanism to promote a project more consistent with his understanding of overcoming the human condition. We present Sorgner's strategy as a way to philosophically enhance transhumanism, as it addresses the impossibility of affirming, for example, materialism and immortality simultaneously. Thus, to philosophically enhance transhumanism means to coherently outline the theoretical presuppositions and practical consequences of a movement capable of influencing how we conceive the entity that we are.

Classic Transhumanism: First-world Utopia

In "A History of Transhumanist Thought," Nick Bostrom acknowledges that confidence in unlimited scientific, technological, and medical progress (2005a, p. 6; p. 10), together with a materialist understanding of the entity that we are (2005a, p. 3), forms the basic assumptions of this transhumanism that has its roots in rationalist humanism (2005a, p. 2; Hughes, 2010).[1] Thus, for Bostrom, human enhancement, in its most optimistic version, seeks to achieve immortality (2003, p. 50) through technological conquest over death (2005c).

The path to achieving these goals is simple to mention, yet complex to immediately accept. If one affirms that the body is a deathtrap that must be overcome through biotechnological enhancement (Bostrom, 2008, p. 3), then the way to realize this involves strategies that discard —at least in principle—parts or the entirety of our corporeality. Becoming a cyborg and the mind uploading are the most common ways in which the spokespersons of this movement try to illustrate a possible overcoming of death. However, both proposals imply offering an answer to a philosophical problem that is not easily solved: identifying what it is that we are. In this sense, the extropian futurologist Max More is aware that this type of question involves metaphysical notions. That is why, for him, transhumanists admit a materialist, physicalist and functionalist understanding of ourselves. This is reflected in the fact that:

> they believe that our thinking, feeling selves are essentially physical processes. While a few transhumanists believe that the self is tied to the current, human physical form, most accept some form of functionalism, meaning that the self has to be instantiated in some physical medium but not necessarily one that is biologically human – or biological at all. If one's biological neurons were gradually replaced, for example, with synthetic parts that supported the same level of cognitive function, the same mind and personality might persist despite being "in" a non-biological substrate. (More, 2013, p. 7)

[1] It is important to insist that this is Bostrom's understanding, which while shared by other spokespersons of transhumanism such as Max More or Mike Treder, is not fully shared by thinkers such as Stefan L. Sorgner. This difference, in our view, is key to pinpointing moments of evolution in transhumanist philosophical thought.

It is no small matter that these presuppositions are presented so vaguely. In More's exposition, there is neither argumentation nor demonstration of the effective viability of functionalism as a presupposition that can adequately explain what we are, on the one hand, and how we might replicate that which we are—in this case, something reduced to mind and personality—on the other. What the mind, personality, or that which makes each of us ourselves effectively ourselves does not seem to need extensive argumentative clarification in the context of transhumanist discursivities. Now, given that the aim is to enhance the human condition beyond death, and that this could be achieved by becoming a cyborg or uploading our entity to a cloud that can then be replicated on different, non-biological substrates, it becomes necessary to devise a plan for how to accomplish this. In this sense, when we consider Bostrom's exposition in his work *Superintelligence* (2014), we find that:

> The whole brain emulation path does not require that we figure out how human cognition works or how to program an artificial intelligence. It requires only that we understand the low-level functional characteristics of the basic computational elements of the brain. No fundamental conceptual or theoretical breakthrough is needed for whole brain emulation to succeed. (Bostrom, 2014, p. 55)

Admitting, and following the exposition of these thinkers, that what we are can be reduced to a set of 'biological neurons gradually replaceable by synthetic parts,' then this phenomenon could be realized according to the optimistic proposal just mentioned. This optimism is reflected in the assumed technological requirements necessary to accomplish this goal, namely: (1) microscopes capable of detecting relevant properties; (2) automated image analysis that can translate the relevant neural components into three-dimensional models, and (3) hardware powerful enough to simulate the results (Bostrom, 2014, pp. 54-59). It is important to note that this exposition does not intend to critically evaluate the actual feasibility of what these thinkers propose—whether their view of what we are can indeed be emulated by processors of a power still unknown to us. Whether this happens or not, and whether these requirements are necessary or not, is a matter for specialized scientific discussion.[2] What concerns us, however, is the way in which these discourses outline the necessary conditions for their proposals to be implemented.

As we have discussed, transhumanist discourses transition from the current possibilities of human enhancement towards the conception that technological singularity will be one of the ways in which death will be effectively overcome. The progression from one realm to the other is clear: while enhancement continues to operate on a theoretical and technical plane, embracing singularity involves pushing to the extreme the confidence in technological progress from an optimistic standpoint, making it unable to maintain a critical distance from its own assumptions. The latter would be identifiable with a utopian realm, and, strange as it may sound, Bostrom himself recognizes his own discourse as such (2008). However, it is necessary to warn that a utopia can be "a good place - an *eu topos* - or it can also be an *ouk topos*—a non-place, something which is not desirable, in which case it can function as a warning" (Sorgner, 2022b, p. 162).

[2] Ralph C. Merkle has provided an illustrative account of the energy consumption required to emulate a brain—its cells, memory, and computational capacity—through an experimental explanatory model. While optimistic about the possibility of transferring our consciousness to a cloud, Merkle's model, unlike Bostrom's, is not as vague in its characterization of the necessary requirements (2013, pp. 157-164).

We consider it appropriate to follow Sorgner's interpretation insofar as it allows us to ask: What precautions should we take regarding this utopian project? This question is valid since, ultimately, classic transhumanism is not only another expression of philosophical incoherence, but also has practical or moral repercussions.

What are the latent dangers of this utopian propagandist hype? It should be noted that when we talk about advertising, we are referring to real discourses that are found not only in non-profit organizations like the Alcor Life Extension Foundation or the Immortality Institute but also in prestigious academic institutions such as the University of Oxford and its Future of Humanity Institute. To illustrate these discourses, we can consider the following blunt statement:

> Tooth decay is natural – should dentistry be outlawed? Polio is natural – should we ban the Sabin vaccine? Cholera is natural – should we allow epidemics to rage unchallenged? Death is natural – must it continue to wreak its dreadful havoc? Clearly this is foolishness. Of course we should use all available means to better human life. We have been doing it for ages with fire, farming, steam, electricity, antibiotics, vaccines, dental prosthesis, organ transplants, etc.; and we should not stop now. If modern science and technology can safely improve the human condition by overcoming natural limits, including aging and death, then they should be used to this end. Determining whether something is good or bad simply by asking whether or not it is natural does not follow common sense. (Treder, 2004, pp. 188-189)

While we cannot criticize the last sentence of the quotation, we can doubt the presuppositions and consequences of such a statement. Blind trust in the power of modern science and technology is evident, as well as a certain normative necessity to overcome the human condition and, with it, also ageing and death. The question we ask here is: what kind of subjectivity emerges from such argumentative presuppositions? Our proposal is that behind this utopian transhumanism operate several assumptions shared by what Mark Fisher has called capitalist realism. As we highlighted in the introduction, following Fuller (2024) and Danaher (2024), this may be a key feature of classic transhumanism, or, alternatively, of the transhuman condition.

Why Access a Posthuman Existence? To Participate in Capitalist Realism

The necromancer of lost futures and of those we are continually losing[3] claimed that a serious attack on capitalist realism is only possible "if, that is to say, capitalism's ostensible 'realism' turns out to be nothing of the sort" (Fisher, 2009, p. 16). However, as long as capitalism's realist determination occupies an absolute place in our understanding of the ways in which we inhabit the world, then "Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable" (2009, p. 8).

This description of capitalist realism is possible insofar as Fisher identifies the presuppositions that enable the emergence of this understanding of existence. In our view, there are three minimal characteristics that describe this form of capitalism. First, the "realism" of this phenomenon is understood as an ideological position—neither universal

[3] That's what Matt Colquhoun called Mark Fisher.

nor necessary—that has become naturalized, i.e. it is an assessment of what the world is and how we relate socially and politically within it (2009, p. 16). Its realism, therefore, is the product of a complex historical web of political determinations that fosters a subjectivity hopeless about any alternative understanding of reality (2009, pp. 7-8). This is why there seems to be no alternative to capitalist realism, as its existence is understood as a fact that is even ontologically beyond the subjects. Secondly, Fisher stresses that "a "business ontology" has been successfully installed, in which it is simply obvious that everything in society must be run as a business, including health care and education" (2009, p. 17). It would not be wrong to identify this characteristic with the mode of subjectification that Foucault identifies with *homo œconomicus*, which in neoliberalism takes the form of the entrepreneur of the self (Foucault, 2008). Finally, it is assumed "that resources are infinite, that the earth itself is merely a husk which capital can at a certain point slough off like a used skin, and that any problem can be solved by the market" (Fisher, 2009, p. 18). This last characteristic is a consequence of the other two: if capitalism is understood as a fact, then its execution through the "business ontology" will demand that not only our relation to ourselves be managed as a business, but also the relation to every existing entity. Thus, the world becomes defenseless in the face of the infinite extractivism. Indeed, the Anthropocene and the threat of climate change are part of the discourses of this form of capitalist realism. There is no alternative, so environmental catastrophe could be understood as a scenario where human survival may not be safe, but the logics of capitalism will continue.

So, we can summarize an understanding of capitalist realism in the words of Jeremy Gilbert:

> Your use of the term 'capitalist realism' seems to designate, at its simplest, both the conviction that there is no alternative to capitalism as a paradigm for social organisation, and the mechanisms which are used to disseminate and reproduce that conviction amongst large populations. As such it would seem to be both a 'structure of feeling', in Williams' terms (or perhaps an 'affective regime' in a slightly more contemporary register) and, in quite a classic sense, a hegemonic ideology, operating as all hegemonic ideologies do, to try to efface their own historicity and the contingency of the social arrangements which they legitimate. (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013, pp. 89-90)

In this sense, we consider that this hegemonic ideology, as a paradigm of social organization, can identify utopian transhumanism as one of its discursive expressions (Rojas Cortés, 2023). A classic question to the project of human enhancement is: why should we increase our capacities until we reach a posthuman existence? Bostrom's answer appeals to an understanding of the value of human life identifiable with the aforementioned notes of capitalist realism, namely, that for him human lives can have different values depending on "how good (or bad) it is for the subject to have this life. The term 'well-being' is often used in this sense" (Bostrom, 2008, p. 31).

We know that one of the goals of the transhumanist project is to achieve an existence beyond the human one. Evidently, one can ask: (a) in what sense would it be 'good' to embrace such a kind of existence, and secondly, (b) who can access this kind of existence? Argentinian philosopher Andres Vaccari indicates that one possible answer to the first

question would be "because posthumanity will be a more beneficial state, better than humanity today" (2019, p. 192), and we ask what and how much this answer presupposes.

A core element in answering our question is to acknowledge that enhancement is valuable for both our present and future state of existence. Therefore, asking about (a) would also imply being able to offer an answer to (b).

Examples involving human lives are always useful to introduce a possible answer. If we compare the life of a young person who dies at the age of 15 due to illness, having lived in extreme poverty and social isolation, with the life of an 80-year-old who has led a full life, it is clear that the latter life will be seen as more desirable than the former (Bostrom, 2005b; 2013). In this relatively simple example, there is a presupposition that connects with the previous critique. If naïve materialism—i.e., the idea that everything can be scientifically analyzed—is valid, then we might also claim that our values are exhausted where our notion of the good becomes the pretense of extending life solely by accumulating more goods, experiencing more situations, or amassing more wealth.

However, the simplicity of this proposal reveals its weaknesses. One may ask again: what is the extent of the words *valuable* and *beneficial* in this context? That is, beneficial and valuable to whom? If this self-improvement is to be achieved exclusively through the use of the most advanced technology—a necessary condition of the project—one might pointedly ask: how much does it cost to access this kind of benefit? Or more specifically, considering technologies already available—albeit on a trial basis—how much does it cost to undergo a cryogenic process? Vaccari raises another interesting question at this point: what kind of commitment does transhumanism have to benefit humanity? That is, we can improve genes, we can create corporations that research cryogenics, but can we not help solve the lack of drinking water in certain parts of the world? (Vaccari, 2019, p. 196). It seems to us that the specific problem of the transhumanist movement is that: "The issue is that transhumanist values are too culturally specific to provide a credible roadmap to posthumanity" (Vaccari, 2019, p. 211).

What we find here, following Germán Cano (2022) are two practical consequences of the realization of capitalist realism. On the one hand, we find a "compulsory individualism" or "popular modernism" (2022, pp. 106-107) that prevents thinking beyond one's own well-being. Thus, narratives that project themselves into new forms of communities are discarded, and working-class life becomes embedded within the confines of bourgeois culture. It is understandable, then, that Bostrom's answer to the question of overcoming the human condition involves such a blunt first person: for it is the individual who works and works himself—in a Foucauldian sense—to be both a producer and a product of satisfaction. On the other hand, there also appears what Cano calls as "democratic paternalism" which seeks, for example, "to transform the educational system into a service industry, privileging little more than quantifiable and measurable objectives, and educators are invited to be nothing more than couchers [sic] and animators . . ." (2022, p. 113). This model of self-care —what Cano calls "therapeutic realism"—also applies to health, insofar as health is understood as simply feeling good. Once again, the answer to the question of why access to an existence beyond humanity fits within capitalist realism becomes clear: because one's well-being is quantifiable in the investment that the subject makes in themselves.

Following these argumentative clues, it would not be wrong to read the transhumanist subjectivity that seeks immortality in the digital cloud also as a discursive form that, although it attempts to promote its ideas as a universal moral necessity, ultimately presupposes a

reduction of any axiological question to an individualistic perspective (Rubio-Pueyo, 2022, p. 75).

In this way, we could affirm that transhumanism as an expression of capitalist realism can also be read as a utopian perspective that depends on the modern ideologies from which these discourses themselves claim to base themselves. This gives rise to a subject that progresses infinitely thanks to reason in order to achieve a life infinitely satisfied with pleasures. Thus, it would be possible to describe the utopian transhumanist as the expressive subjectivity of *the entrepreneur of the self*.

The problem with this transhumanism is that it does not seem to be philosophically well-founded, yet its consequences are terribly effective. We argue that it lacks a solid philosophical foundation because it fails to consider the historical development of the discipline of philosophy. For example, one could simply refer to Epicurus' reasoning regarding goods to cast doubt on the idea that a longer life necessarily results in better and more good experiences.

Finally, accepting that transhumanist imaginaries are possible, the question of who could have access to this kind of existence would suffice to demand the value of cryogenics or the value necessary to create processors powerful enough to emulate a mind. The result of this skeptical operation is simple: this form of transhumanist thinking lacks coherent and conscious philosophical development of its presuppositions and scope.

Twisting Transhumanism or how to Overcome the Transhuman Condition

If the presuppositions are different, so are the consequences. Having this in mind, we can consider Stefan L. Sorgner's project as a methodology that aims to improve transhumanism, i.e., to offer a philosophical description of transhumanism (Rojas Cortés, 2022c). While Bostrom dismissed Nietzsche's influence on transhumanism (2005a), the Euro-transhumanism began a long discussion about the positive influence of the philosopher from Sils-Maria on this movement. I am not interested in discussing here whether this influence is effective or not, as much ink has been spilled on this topic already (Tuncel, 2017). What is certain is that Sorgner's most original thought has indeed been influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy (Rojas Cortés, 2022b), and in this case, Nietzsche's influence cannot be denied for the weak Nietzschean transhumanismus (*schwachen Nietzscheanischen Transhumanismus*), or the Euro-transhumanism, proposed by Sorgner (2024, p. 394). We believe that Sorgner has developed a way to overcome what we described in the previous section as the transhuman condition.

Then, admitting Nietzsche's influence on transhumanism implies embracing Heraclitus and abandoning—at least in principle—the naive enlightened rationalism that structures the classic transhumanism we described in the previous section. Here we encounter an ontological view that understands the world as "continual becoming" (Sorgner, 2022b, p. 12; p. 138). The immediate consequence of this is "alethic nihilism" and "ethical nihilism" (Sorgner, 2022b, pp. 17-19). Regarding the former, it is affirmed that "Nothing positive can be said which corresponds with the world with certainty" (2022b, p. 18), while for the latter, it is stated: "that no non-formal judgement of the good is plausible for all people" (2022b, p. 19). From our perspective, these consequences can also be understood as useful strategies for positioning another kind of transhumanism.

The question, "why would it be a good idea to be a posthuman?" could not be answered by addressing Bostrom's comparison between the Third Worldist short life and the First Worldist long life, because such a perspective is violent towards the multiple conceptions

of good that other people may have. A short, intense, and healthy but tragic life might be even more valuable to someone than a long and comfortable one. Therefore, More's fantasy of removing the political limits of our condition (More, 2003) would constitute a nonsense. If nothing can be established as a single, universal truth, politics is not exempt from that either. A first-world transhumanist utopia, is just one possible perspective in the war for values (Sorgner, 2017).

Furthermore, Sorgner's naturalistic perspective would not allow him to blindly trust proposals such as mind uploading or cryogenics based on faith in perpetual scientific progress. In fact, if we admit that;

> A naturalist account of the word implies that all entities can in principle be accessed empirically. This does not mean that all entities can already by [sic] investigated empirically, but it implies at least that in principle an empirical analysis of all entities is possible (2022a, pp. 50-51)

Then, the relationship between transhumanism and the goal of extending life should change in order to follow a coherent argument. It would not be acceptable to keep faith with enhancement projects that aim to spend material resources and productive efforts on achieving the singularity in its mind-machine fusion version or the cryogenisation of the richest. That is not because we believe it impossible to achieve, but because its success depends on a series of empirical investigations that have not yet occurred. Rather than contributing to a state of cryogenic "half-life" suspension as the one accessed by Glen Runciter in *Ubik* (Dick, 1969), it would be more coherent to focus efforts on pressing contemporary problems—why freeze people when we can save glaciers? From an empirical analysis it is possible to explain the death of human entities, however, the desire for the overcoming of the limits of the human condition does not seem explicable. Such a goal is only a possible perspective on the question of what is good.

It is also important to note that the question of why it might be a good idea to be a posthuman loses meaning from an ontology of permanent becoming. Because "we have always been cyborgs" (2022b). There is no point in becoming something we have always been. This statement is important insofar as it represents a break from rationalist and enlightened transhumanist assumptions. Ultimately, what underlies this corresponds to posthumanist premises from which we can understand ourselves,

> Cyborgs are therefore controlled organism. Control already happens with us becoming human. In philosophy, human beings were usually defined by their ability to speak. Learning language is our first upgrade, which our parents provide us with. Our cyborgization continues with the acquisition of new skills, such as learning mathematics, history, and so on. However, a new dynamic is currently emerging. […]. With the integration of digital technologies intro our humanity, new possibilities as well as serious challenges arise. (Sorgner 2022b, 32)

Sorgner's perspective is consistent with the denial of an essential, fixed, and immutable identity justified by the appeal to a conception of human nature (Fukuyama 2002; Sandel 2009; Habermas 2003) and is also aware that the understandings we offer of ourselves depend on discourses of power that steer the human herd, to use Sloterdijk's expression in his *Regeln für den Menschenpark* (1999). Transhumanism, then, is also inserted in the disputes

over the definition of the entity that we are. However, Sorgner's gesture prevents this dispute from continuing in essentialist terms. If there is no natural essence, neither is it possible to predicate a difference between technology and nature. Undergoing enhancement to abandon the human condition makes no sense if we have never been humans. To exist as cyborgs implies an existence beyond the human if we admit that technology plays a crucial role in our self-understanding. This is why Sorgner speaks of "cyborization," as the entity that we are must be subject to changes that also include the agency of technology. In this sense, despite technology not being new to our self-understanding, we do find ourselves in an age where technological agency has global and cellular impact—the possibilities for political manipulation or medical research through the production of digital data have never been more real.

More specific consequences of embracing an ontology of permanent becoming could be discussed, but in our view the most important is the weakening of transhumanism (*indebolimento*) (Sorgner, 2021, p. 53; 2022b, p. 138). Briefly, this weakening refers to the fundamental premises of trans-, and post-humanism, admitting a degree of confidence in technology like the transhumanists and discarding the claim of a special existence for the human with the posthumanists. We consider that this operation responds to a philosophical strategy on Sorgner's part, since a transhumanism such as we discussed in the previous section can be easily refuted. The strategy, as mentioned in the introduction, is the "twist".

> The concept of the twist corresponds to the German notion of Verwindung. Verwindung (twist) differs from Überwindung (overcoming) in so far as it is not a leaving behind of something. Overcoming leaves behind and separates itself categorically from the past, whereas a twist develops the past further in an inclusive manner. (Sorgner, 2022a, pp. 120-121)

The strategy is particularly interesting and, in fact, could be reformulated in the following statement: transhumanism needs a coherent philosophical foundation, and this means re-interpreting their presuppositions (Rojas Cortés, 2022c). An example of this "twisting" is what happens with the notions of soul and body;

> The immaterial mind and the material body get woven into a psychophysiological unity. What used to be the divine spark in us gets interpreted as a technological steering of an organism. We turn into cyborgs, i.e., cybernetic organism. (Sorgner 2022b, p. 21).

This strategy is particularly useful, for example, when they are criticized as dualists and colonisers (Rojas Cortés, 2022a). In Sorgner's words, the problem is that classic transhumanism, philosophically misinformed, represents a form of violent and morally problematic paternalism (Sorgner, 2022b, p. 139). However, the solution could not be the eradication of human beings from existence to solve the problems we have created for the earth and the other beings that inhabit it. That is why even strong critical posthumanist influence must be weakened (2022c, p. 185) to respect and safeguard the concept of negative freedom that was achieved with modernity. In this sense, neo-Luddism would be as paternalistic an alternative as extreme technophilia. Consequently, we speak of conceiving new concepts since "twisting" is a methodological strategy that serves to explain the difference between Euro-transhumanism and Classic Transhumanism.

Therefore, "twisting" functions as a strategy or methodology that attempts to base on coherent presuppositions the ideas that are worth rescuing from a movement such as the transhumanist one and discarding them in order to respect both ethical nihilism and the achievement of negative freedom. However, we could say that even by twisting transhumanism and generating a weak version of it, there are still clear limits to its general acceptance.

Conclusion

Not all transhumanist expressions, as we have seen, are necessarily coherent in terms of awareness of the consequences their philosophical presuppositions may entail. In fact, classic transhumanism displays a profoundly unphilosophical attitude: its optimistic faith in the supposedly infinite power of science makes this movement appear as an ideology exclusive to the first world. We consider such a critique to be well-founded insofar as, on the one hand, proposals like mind transfer, waiting for the AI Singularity to occur, or expectations in cryonics to extend life only work if certain philosophical ideas are assumed to be valid while viewed from another perspective, these proposals are not accessible to the majority, nor do they respond to their interests.

In this sense, it is imperative to be frank and admit that transhumanism as a cultural movement, if it does not want to be abandoned for ludditic reasons, urgently needs to be subjected to an improvement: not of any kind but philosophical; because if we admit that language is also a technology (Sorgner, 2022b, p. 9), why not learn a little philosophy before trying to conceive the becoming of cyborgs in a literal sense?

It is true that transhumanism as a cultural movement is not only related to philosophy but also to a variety of humanistic and scientific disciplines. It is not clear if there is a minimum list of disciplines required to consider someone as a better or worse representative of transhumanism. However, it is known that at first glance, some of the most well-known representatives of our case study could be considered polymaths, that is, people who know many topics that allow them to solve various concrete problems. Nevertheless, we consider that it is precisely this broad range of knowledge to master and problems to solve that is the reason why classic transhumanism has no potential in its philosophical reflections. Just as knowing a lot about electricity does not make me a good electrician, having certain academic degrees related to disciplines akin to philosophy does not make me a good philosopher.

Sorgner's effort to present a philosophically coherent transhumanism, even to readers outside its European context, deserves to be analyzed as a strategy that could rehabilitate transhumanism from criticisms that, at this stage of the academic discussion, are already considered classic. Accusing transhumanism of being a first-world ideology is not new; in fact, its proponents acknowledge it (Fuller & Lipinska, 2014). However, what is interesting about Sorgner's approach is that he offers a discourse adaptable to entities that do not necessarily identify with a privileged existence, such as those in the global south. In this sense, *twisting* the assumptions of transhumanism could provide a way to outline a philosophical proposal that is less paternalistic and, therefore, more democratic in its practical consequences. If we have always been cyborgs, it is not possible to deny the objective of overcoming the human condition, but it is possible to seek non-violent ways of achieving this goal.

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SORGNER VS. BOSTROM, OR NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHICAL RELEVANCE TO TRANSHUMANISM

Marius Markuckas

Abstract

More than fifteen years have passed since the acclaimed paper "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism" by Stefan L. Sorgner was published (Sorgner, 2009). In that paper, Sorgner challenged the presentation of the relationship between transhumanism and Nietzsche's philosophy as provided by Nick Bostrom (Bostrom, 2005), another renowned researcher in the field of transhumanism. Bostrom attempted to offer reasons why Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be treated as an essential conceptual resource in terms of the transhumanist worldview. In turn, Sorgner tried to prove that Bostrom's approach, which underestimates the relevance of Nietzsche's philosophy to the development of transhumanist thought, is misleading, and consequently made an effort to demonstrate why Nietzsche's philosophy should be considered as the conceptual basis of transhumanism (Sorgner, 2009). This paper returns to the controversy opened up by Sorgner and Bostrom regarding transhumanism and its relationship with Nietzsche's philosophy. An analysis of these authors' arguments reveals a paradoxical and seemingly even contradictory theoretical situation: in evaluating the status of Nietzsche's philosophy in the context of transhumanist thinking, both thinkers were simultaneously mistaken and correct. The paper demonstrates that such a situation has emerged because of transhumanism's own lack of definitiveness—or the possibility of understanding it variously. The paper asserts that an adequate theoretical evaluation and definition of the relationship between transhumanism and Nietzsche's philosophy is possible only by looking for aspects of reconciliation between Bostrom's and Sorgner's explanations of this relationship.

Keywords

Sorgner, Bostrom, Nietzsche, transhumanism, weak transhumanism, overhuman.

Introduction

The conceptual relationship between transhumanism and Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy has been widely analysed. Many academic papers, including essay collections, have been dedicated to contemplating this question e.g., see Tuncel, 2017. Considerations on this issue in the field of transhumanism studies have been especially stimulated by the disagreement between prominent philosophers Nick Bostrom and Stefan L. Sorgner regarding the status of Nietzsche's philosophical ideas in the context of the formation and development of transhumanist thought.

A more thorough overview of the aforementioned controversy, which also inspired this

paper, will be provided in the main part. For now, it will suffice to note that at the core of this controversy lies Bostrom's belief that there is no substantial reason to consider Nietzsche's philosophy conceptually relevant to transhumanism, and Sorgner's opposing view that Nietzsche's thought should definitely be treated as such. Analysis of Bostrom's and Sorgner's arguments reveals a rather paradoxical theoretical conundrum—namely, that both philosophers were simultaneously mistaken and correct. This paper demonstrates that such a situation emerged because of transhumanism's own lack of definitiveness, i.e. the possibility of understanding and presenting it in different ways, which highlights the ambivalent status of Nietzsche's philosophy in the formation and development of the transhumanist project. This paper asserts that an adequate evaluation and presentation of the relationship between transhumanism and Nietzsche's philosophy is possible only by looking for ways of reconciling Bostrom's and Sorgner's positions.

The Status of Modern Science and Anthropological Prospects in Nietzsche's Philosophy

The controversy between Sorgner and Bostrom regarding the question as to whether or not Nietzsche's philosophy should be considered conceptually relevant to transhumanism has been going on for more than fifteen years. It originated with the publication of Sorgner's acclaimed paper "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism" in 2009. In it, Sorgner tried to demonstrate that Bostrom's theoretical approach, which underestimates Nietzsche's philosophical importance to transhumanist thought, is misleading, and attempted to reason why Nietzsche's philosophy should be considered the very conceptual basis of transhumanism.

Before I begin to explain the arguments this controversy is based upon, it would be expedient to first pose the following question: Do contemporary transhumanists and Nietzsche view the status of science with regard to reality in the same way? The reasoning behind this question is simple enough. The proponents of transhumanism claim that science (and cutting-edge technologies based on scientific advancements) is the fundamental transformative power capable of fulfilling humanity's greatest hopes—i.e. radically changing not only human existence, but also our entire being. According to the majority of transhumanists, nothing is impossible for science and modern technologies. Benjamin Ross presents this belief as "epistemological certainty" (Ross, 2020, pp. 13-17). According to this perspective, humans are capable (due to their inherent traits of rationality and agency) not only to reveal all the secrets of existence, but also to improve for the better various facets of their very being (i.e. its anthropological aspects) and those of the world surrounding them (i.e. its ontological aspects).

It is important to note here that transhumanism is inseparable from a certain idea of good, which manifests as the potentiality for perfecting everything. In the most general sense, the transhumanist project is focused on improving the human condition—as in, creating better beings, the so-called "transhumans" or "posthumans", out of currently variously limited humans (Hauskeller, 2010). It should also be noted that the bioconservative critics of transhumanism (such as Jürgen Habermas, Francis Fukuyama, Michael Sandel, and Leon Kass) point out that in developing the transhumanist project (or, more specifically, introducing technologies that empower it, e.g. various biotechnologies such as genetic engineering, pharmacological enhancement, cloning, etc.), this condition can be worsened or even made disastrous for humanity (or at least for some groups of people). Fukuyama goes as far as to call transhumanism "the most dangerous idea" (Fukuyama, 2004,

p. 43). However, even bioconservative thinkers, would likely not deny that the transhumanist project is intended primarily to improve the human condition. Its potentially dangerous outcomes or unforeseen consequences—both conceptual and practical—are a different matter, however, and it is precisely because of this possibility of anthropologically and socially devastating effects that we must be extremely careful about promoting any transhumanistically oriented agenda in our societies—even by refusing to propagate certain ideas or apply specific practices due to their potential destructiveness.

Now, let us turn back to Nietzsche's philosophy and see whether he contemplated all these questions, in the broadest sense, about good and evil in the same way that transhumanists and their critics do today, while bearing in mind his famous philosophical leitmotif of the "death"—or, more precisely, the "killing"—of God. Nietzsche has also become well-known for another idea—that the present and future world is and will be marked by thinking beyond the traditional categories of good and evil, thus making the distinction between value slavery and value mastery increasingly relevant. One may wonder if Nietzsche wished to encourage all of this: Was it his true intellectual desire as a man and a philosopher to overcome hierarchically-structured traditional patterns of thinking and create a new type of ethics, based exclusively on the principle of unlimited will and power?

Before attempting to answer this question, it should first be noted that Nietzsche was undoubtedly an outstanding cultural diagnostician, and one of the most perceptive thinkers of all time. Having witnessed the rapid development of anti-metaphysically oriented modern science, he was well aware that an era of universal relativism and nihilism was inevitably coming. From the perspective of the philosophy of science, it could be reasonably stated that his thesis of "the killing of God" also contained the prospect of the murdering of theory. As attested to by the etymology of this term, theory embodies a divine element, which in Nietzsche's case is not religious, but philosophical[1]. It was Nietzsche whose works, like no other, have prompted us to reconsider whether it is possible to know objective reality and simultaneously derive from its objective guidelines of human agency (ones based on the categories of "good" and "evil"), should we theoretically reject—or ourselves commit the murder of—a metaphysically grounded traditional worldview (which, in the most fundamental sense, was based on the idea of objective truth). Nietzsche's own answer to the question at the epicentre of these considerations was perfectly clear. According to him, the only thing possible is pure power (or, in his own terms, will to power), and everything that reality consists of (hence, reality itself) are merely manifestations of it[2].

Despite the fact that Nietzsche clearly saw and philosophically reasoned that alongside the rise and gradual dominance of modern science, humanity was also experiencing a shift towards both a new conception of reality and a new respective system of ethics, it does not mean that he himself was not critical of this paradigmatic event, or that he promoted it; philosophical, cultural and scientific diagnoses of modernity provided by Nietzsche should not be confused with his own aspirations as a man. However, although Nietzsche's

[1] It should be noted that the term "theory" derives from the ancient Greek language, and contains in itself the connotations of "observation," "viewing," and "consideration," as well as "divinity"; in ancient Greek, the word "theos" also referred to God.

[2] The fact that Nietzsche's philosophy, characterized by thinking beyond the categories of good and evil, is alien to the transhumanist belief that humanity's condition can be made better, is also emphasized by Michael Hauskeller, who further states that "[a]ccording to Nietzsche, the philosopher needs to position himself "beyond good and evil," because there are no moral facts and nothing that is truly better or worse than anything else." (Hauskeller, 2010).

philosophy—which he described as "philosophizing with the hammer"[3]—undoubtedly delineated a new direction of emerging philosophical thinking, the question of whether Nietzsche truly desired the elimination of all metaphysical attributes from philosophy and our lives, or if he merely stated it as a tell-tale sign of the Western world's irreversible cultural shift, during which modern assumptions of thinking would be expressed in increasingly anti-metaphysical forms (and ultimately, as we have since learned, acquire the cultural form of the radically anti-metaphysical postmodernity), and was the first thinker to identify it as an inevitable fact, remains open.

The posing of such a question is enabled by doubts regarding the dominant one-way image of Nietzsche as an active "destroyer" of the metaphysical worldview, whose very philosophy yearns to reject the legacy of classical thinking. This image makes it considerably more difficult to view Nietzsche from a different conceptual perspective—one in which his philosophizing with the hammer could be interpreted as a sort of theoretical divination, the actual purpose of which is to merely anticipate certain events, removing the last conceptual layers of a metaphysically decaying reality, and to reveal what ultimately remains (or will inevitably remain) of it—i.e., the ontology of power. Such treatment of Nietzsche's philosophy as a kind of herald of a new ontology, could also be supported by Martin Heidegger's explication of Nietzsche's philosophy in his essay "The Word of Nietzsche: "God Is Dead"". In this essay, Nietzsche is presented as a thinker who predicted the upcoming replacement of traditional metaphysics with the nihilist principle of radical power. However, it is important to note that by presenting Nietzsche in this way, Heidegger nevertheless makes it clear that, despite the fact that in Nietzsche's philosophy "metaphysics has in a certain sense divested itself of its own essential possibility" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 53), this does not mean that Nietzsche was a naïve uncritical progressivist, completely indifferent to what we could, in the most general sense, call the fate of tradition.

This claim is supported by quotes from Nietzsche's own works chosen by Heidegger in his aforementioned essay. In them, the idea of nihilism unfolds as modern man's inevitable fate that a philosopher has a duty to reveal, but which nevertheless remains deeply obscure, and not as an enthusiastically pursued goal that will undoubtedly lead humanity to unprecedented well-being. For example, Heidegger quotes the entire section no. 125, entitled "The Madman", from Nietzsche's book *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche questions the new emerging cultural state of being, presented symbolically through the idea of the death of God, by employing the figure of the Madman, and delineates the "existential vagueness" of this emerging cultural state of being. Nietzsche portrays the Madman, who one day arrives at a market place in search of God, and eventually proclaims to those present that God has been killed, and all of them are to blame for the murder (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 59–60). The Madman poses a multitude of questions, including that of who will now wipe the blood of what was holiest and most powerful, as if alluding to the fundamental existential challenge which the murderers of God will inevitably have to face, having wiped away the existential horizon enabled by the traditional worldview.

As Heidegger demonstrates in his essay, this fragment of Nietzsche's text, presented through the lens of madness, should be interpreted precisely within the context of nihilism—the determining phenomenon of the current historical and cultural era, identified and revealed by Nietzsche himself. It should also be noted that the nihilist context mentioned here is essentially ambivalent. On the one hand, it manifests itself in a clearly

[3] This description is also embodied in the title of one of Nietzsche's works (1997), *Twilight of the Idols. Or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*.

negative sense, i.e. as the killing of—in the form of God—reality's "realness" itself, the shadow of which, like the blood that is hard or even impossible to wash off, will forever follow the existence of the modern human. On the other hand, this context can also manifest itself (even if not expressed so evidently) in a positive sense, i.e., as a field of new existential possibilities opened up by the loss of an immutable metaphysical reality.

The ambivalence of this nihilist context in Nietzsche's philosophy is reflected most clearly and is conceptually structured by two fundamental anthropological prospects, marked by the categories of the last man and the overhuman (see Nietzsche 2006, p. 6; 9)[4]. By employing these categories, Nietzsche makes it clear that the existence of the future human will be characterized by two possibilities that are radically different. On the one hand, as Nietzsche's vision of the last man implies, the modern anti-metaphysically oriented revolution of reality may indeed cause the future human to experience nihilism as a crisis of value and meaning, which will determine the degradation of humanity—its spiritual stagnation and the decline of its creative power. On the other hand, however, as implied by the vision of the overhuman, in the metaphysically fractured modern reality, future humans can discover themselves as an unlimited creator, who is called upon by their own will to spiritually and physically remake the world, including themselves as an inseparable part of it, and thus keep endlessly opening up new existential possibilities and expanding the horizons of humanity's existence in terms of value and meaning.

Based on the aforementioned excerpt from *The Gay Science* as cited by Heidegger, one might try to prove that by expressing through the figure of the Madman the existential "vagueness" of the newly emerging world, Nietzsche nevertheless assuredly believed not only that the on-going cultural shift of the modern world could no longer be redirected (i.e., the modern assumptions of thought would continue to manifest itself in increasingly radical anti-metaphysical forms), but also that humans will inevitably have to look for a new grounding of their existence and ways of realizing it (i.e., in order to not become the last humans they would have to become overhumans). However, even such a belief does not necessarily mean that Nietzsche thought of the symbolic death of metaphysics in the form of the death of God in the same way as it was understood by the prominent Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers, i.e., as the "institutional" liberation of the human and maximal dispersion of the rational principle (scientific consciousness), which will undoubtedly lead humanity to a perfect existential state. In other words, Nietzsche's overhuman should not be identified with the "enlightened" or "liberated" human, who knows precisely what needs to be done to fully improve themselves and the world surrounding them.[5] As such, in order to determine Nietzsche's authentic theoretical relationship with transhumanism (while simultaneously evaluating the soundness of explanations of this relationship as provided by Sorgner and Bostrom), we must first ascertain what Nietzsche's overhuman truly is.

[4] The term "overhuman" is used frequently in this paper. However, some quotations employ the term "overman", just as they are used in the original translations of the works cited. Nevertheless, it should be noted that both of these terms are synonymous and generally refer to the same German term—*der Übermensch*. There is also another reason why it is expedient to use the term "overhuman" specifically. As has been noted by Sorgner, "[i]n German the term *Übermensch* can apply to both sexes, which the notion *overhuman* can, but overman cannot" (Sorgner, 2009, p. 29).

[5] These notions, which echo the image of omnipotence of modern knowledge and the human, were eventually embodied in various different modern ideologies (socialism, liberalism, communism, national socialism, etc.), the emergence of all of which was based on the fundamental idea that reality can, in fact, be nearly completely remade by certain wilful human actions.

Different Conceptions of Transhumanism and the Differing Status of Nietzsche's Philosophy

In his acclaimed paper "A History of Transhumanist Thought" (Bostrom, 2005) which, as its title implies, presents the historical and conceptual development of transhumanism, Bostrom dedicates only a small part of the text to discussing Nietzsche's philosophy. Here, Bostrom notes that

> . . . [i]t might be thought that a major inspiration for transhumanism was Friedrich Nietzsche, famous for his doctrine of *der Übermensch* <...> [w]hat Nietzsche had in mind, however, was not technological transformation but a kind of soaring personal growth and cultural refinement in exceptional individuals (who he thought would have to overcome the life-sapping "slave-morality" of Christianity). (Bostrom, 2005, p. 4).

Furthermore, Bostrom also insightfully states that

> . . . [d]espite some surface-level similarities with the Nietzschean vision, transhumanism—with its Enlightenment roots, its emphasis on individual liberties, and its humanistic concern for the welfare of all humans (and other sentient beings)—probably has as much or more in common with Nietzsche's contemporary the English liberal thinker and utilitarian John Stuart Mill. (Bostrom, 2005, pp. 4-5)

Heidegger's philosophical explanation of Nietzsche's overhuman closely corresponds to Bostrom's insights. This explanation makes it clear that, as stated by Bostrom, the origins of transhumanism should be looked for in the Renaissance and Enlightenment paradigms of philosophical thinking, and not Nietzsche's works. This is because the category of *der Übermensch* must be considered not as a particular anthropological aspiration or a clearly-defined goal of humanity, but as a new existential principle—or an inevitable anthropological fate of the modern human. According to Heidegger,

> . . . [b]y this name [overman] Nietzsche does not mean any isolated exemplar of man in whom the abilities and purposes of man as ordinarily are magnified and enhanced to gigantic proportions. <...> [t]he name 'overman' designates the essence of humanity, which, as modern humanity, is begining [*sic*] to enter into the consummation belonging to the essence of its age. 'Overman' is man who *is* man from out of the reality determined through the will to power, and for that reality. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 96).

This conception of Nietzsche's overhuman as provided by Heidegger could be summarized by stating that this category generally refers not to a comprehensively ideal being, but the potentiality of reality, which can be demonstrated and realized only through wilful human existence. It should be noted that the maximal expression of the existential principle of will to power is only made possible by rejecting any transcendental basis that enables perceiving the world as a fixed metaphysical given and, in turn, by accepting the idea that this mundane world is a perpetual becoming, structured by human agency. There

is nothing beyond human power. Everything that exists in reality as a horizon of meaning, exists only as earthly human efforts and decisions. As stated by Nietzsche himself in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "[t]he overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 6)

However, it must again be emphasized here that the category of Nietzsche's overhuman does not refer to any "complete" anthropology. According to Nietzsche, "as ape to a human is a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment, so the human to the overman shall be a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 6). It is through this statement that Nietzsche, by employing the evolutionary model, clearly implies that overhumanness must be considered from the perspective of a becoming—not ultimate—reality. Accordingly, to be an overhuman is to be one in a specific reality—or, as stated by Heidegger, to be a man from out of reality and for that reality. Such explication of the concept of the overhuman is also confirmed by the fact that Nietzsche perceived certain overhuman traits in some historical personalities, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, for example, who, despite being human, expanded the horizons of the possibilities of historical reality through his spiritual freedom, self-overcoming, and creative agency, while simultaneously embodying—in the most vivid existential form—the principle of will to power. For instance, in the section "What I Owe to the Ancients" of his work *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche describes Goethe as a man who sought to overcome the time he lived in and attain existential totality. Goethe was characterized by discipline and self-creation, which brought him wholeness and, according to Nietzsche, "…[c]onceived of a human being who was strong, highly cultivated, skilled in everything bodily, with self-control and self-respect—a human being who is allowed to dare to accept the entire scope and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom <...>". (Nietzsche, 1997, pp. 83–84)

Nevertheless, these empirical references to the overhumanness do not imply that the overhuman exists in the form of defined or pre-determined ideals. Nietzsche's perception of overhumanness in certain people[6] does in itself attest to the fact that humanity does not at all need to arrive at a specific future existential point in order to become overhuman; rather, overhumanness is an existential principle or mode of existence, viable within the particular limits of our current anthropological state—or, as Bostrom noted, one can be an exceptional, albeit still human individual. Nietzsche's understanding of the overhuman in this way is the main reason why all theoretical efforts to relate the category of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* to any defined concept of the transhuman or posthuman as they exist in contemporary transhumanist visions, cannot be considered a reasonable practice[7].

Bearing this in mind, Bostrom's refusal to acknowledge Nietzsche as a thinker important to transhumanism should be treated as a correct decision. Compared to transhumanist thought, Nietzsche's philosophy is too "spiritual" and not "technological" enough; more importantly, it treats as alien the idea of their allegedly being a finite "perfect" goal of our

[6] Goethe is often presented as a man to whom Nietzsche attributed many overhuman qualities. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are several other historical personalities for whom Nietzsche had a similar high regard as Geothe, and whom he was also inclined to describe using concepts characteristic to the category of the overhuman, who can themselves be considered the inspiration behind the category itself. Notable among them are Napoleon Bonaparte, Julius Caesar, and Michelangelo.

[7] This view is seemingly also held by Hauskeller, whose considerations on Nietzsche's category of an "overhuman" refer to its vagueness. As he notes, "Nietzsche himself warned of misunderstanding the overhuman as some kind of higher human." (Hauskeller, 2010) Such an understanding of the overhuman, of course, can hardly—if at all—be compatible with transhumanist conceptions of the posthuman as a radically "improved" (or "higher") human.

existence, no matter how it may be represented—be it the creation of a perfect transhuman or the establishment of a perfect posthuman condition. In other words, Nietzsche dismisses the Enlightenment belief that permeates the paradigms of humanist and transhumanist thought: that on the basis of institutional change and the development of both scientific and technological knowledge, it is indeed possible to create heaven on earth with perfect beings existing in it. The latter view is most clearly expressed and represented in transhumanism studies by a statement of Max More, one of the most prominent theoreticians of this field, that we humans must always remain in a state of progress—thus clearly delineating the finite direction of it—"on to transhumanity and beyond into a posthuman stage" (More, 1990, p. 11).

In this paper, I won't attempt to analyse comprehensively the contradictory nature of the aforementioned statement, or the self-defeating character of the paradigm of transhumanist thought in general.[8] Given this paper's goal, it will be enough to state that More's position cannot be reasonably grounded—the same as any other position that attempts to "empiricise" the ideals of transhumanism—in the same way as Sorgner did (see Sorgner, 2009), for example by comparing the conceptions of transhuman and posthuman of Bostrom and F. M. Esfandiary (another prominent theoretician of transhumanism), by employing Nietzsche's philosophical resources. This is because, from the perspective of Nietzsche's thought, overhumanness—due to the nihilistic nature of reality itself—can only manifest itself in the form of unbounded creative will and unlimited power, and cannot in principle acquire the finite form of an empirically tangible "actuality"; rather, it must always remain within the realm of "potentiality"—or, using Nietzsche's philosophical categories referring to the ceaseless change of reality, unfold as the principle of "eternal recurrence". Thus, any attempt to "empiricize" Nietzsche's category of *der Übermensch* by imposing it onto the relevancies of a specific historical time, inevitably impoverishes Nietzsche's thought, and threatens to void it of its true philosophical essence. This essence is the anthropological self-consciousness of the modern human, or the realization of their existential fate as a being, denoted precisely by the category of *der Übermensch*—to openly accept the nihilistic nature of both reality and themselves as an inseparable part of it, and treat it as a realm of unlimited possibilities subject to the human will. In other words, to be an overhuman means to perceive existential meaning not in a (supposedly) finite perfect goal, but in terms of a challenging perpetual becoming.

Having ascertained that the Nietzschean overhuman is not at all the omnipotent *Homo Deus* encountered in certain transhumanistically oriented visions, but rather *Homo Creativus*, who merely seeks, through his own wilful existence, to maximise and then further develop all the possibilities of this world, we can finally explain the ambivalent relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and transhumanism, which substantiates the paradoxical situation in which Bostrom and Sorgner, in evaluating this relationship, were both mistaken and correct. This paradox fundamentally arises from the aforementioned contradictory nature of the paradigm of transhumanist thought, which is, in turn, determined by the fact that this line of reasoning is largely constituted by a belief that the human can improve themselves in such a way as to become an existentially perfect entity, the so-called "transhuman" or "posthuman", and that the human does not have any predetermined limits—they are unlimited, as are the prospects of their self-perfecting. It is precisely in the light of this

[8] The author of this paper has thoroughly analyzed the issue of transhumanism as a self-contradictory conceptual project in his doctoral dissertation (see Markuckas 2022a), and has also touched upon it in several of his later scholarly pieces based on the dissertation (see Markuckas 2022b; Markuckas 2024).

controversy that Sorgner's insight, which he began to develop theoretically as early as his paper "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism" (2009) and which he provided a substantial reasoning for in his seminal work *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* (2022)—namely, that transhumanist ontology is an ontology of permanent becoming—allows us, on the one hand, to treat Nietzsche's philosophy as indeed relevant to transhumanist thought, and, on the other hand, provides theoretical preconditions for mitigating the conceptual contradictoriness of the paradigm of transhumanist thought.

In an attempt to explain the latter idea in more detail, it should first be stated that by refusing to understand transhumanism from the position of—to use the terms suggested by Thomas D. Philbeck—a humanistically-oriented "naïve ontology" (Philbeck, 2014), and by employing Nietzsche's philosophical anthropological resources, Sorgner grasped and explicated the authentic ontological nature of transhumanism in a much more insightful way than Bostrom did, describing it as "non-utopian Nietzschean transhumanism" (Sorgner, 2022, p. 62). We could reasonably discuss whether or not it was, in fact, a consequence of Nietzsche's philosophical influence that the actual, and not the naïve ontology of transhumanism is fluid, and thus inevitably non-utopian, considering that, as was already emphasized in this paper, no definite goal—neither realistic, nor utopian—can exist in the perspective of permanent becoming. It can also be reasonably stated that such an ontological character of transhumanism is primarily determined not by Nietzsche's philosophy, but the ontological specificity of the main "driving force" of this project—i.e., anti-metaphysical modern science, which seeks not to merely "know" reality, but to remake (or "create") it.[9] As was already demonstrated in the previous section, Nietzsche had an especially profound understanding of this specificity, which he brilliantly embodied in his own philosophy. However, no matter how one views the philosophical importance of Nietzsche's ideas with regard to the development of transhumanist thought, there can be little doubt that Nietzsche's philosophical resources do indeed allow for a detailed explication and adequate representation of the ontological status and character of transhumanism, and that alone is reason enough to consider Nietzsche a thinker whose philosophical ideas truly adhere to the conceptual core of transhumanism.

Furthermore, as clearly attested to by Sorgner's own conception of neo-Nietzschean "weak transhumanism," which he also denotes by the term "metahumanism" (Sorgner, 2022, p. 138), the essential basis of these ideas makes possible the elimination, or at least the mitigation, of the conceptual contradictions of transhumanism. And so, what is this essence, exactly? Based on the analysis of the category of *der Übermensch* provided above, it would be reasonable to state that this essence is constituted by the daring recognition of the ontological indefiniteness of the human as a being—or the human's self-perception from a radically existentialist position. In this perspective, it is simply impossible to define any objective limits of the human as a being, and to identify any objective (or widely accepted) points of reference demarcating the process of their self-perfecting. Considering that this perspective does not allow for any absolutes, it follows that no scientific or technological absolutism can exist either, which also means that one must inevitably reject the aforementioned notion of epistemological certainty that characterizes transhumanism. This is confirmed by Aura Elena Schussler's explication of Sorgnerian weak transhumanism. Schussler does not deny that weak transhumanism acknowledges the importance of science

[9] Such a conception of science, characteristic of the entire modern era, has been most clearly described by Francis Bacon, to whom belong the famous words *scientia potestas est*, indicating the convergence between scientific knowledge and power.

and advanced technologies. Nevertheless, she notes the contextually paradigmatic character of science and technologies, and emphasizes not only that weak transhumanism lacks "absolutization of science, technology, progress, and human enhancements", but also that this deficiency guides humans "to embrace pluralism and perspectivism and become aware of their continuous movement relationality within the various horizons of worldly challenges linked to technology" (Schussler, 2024, pp. 29–30). By presenting weak transhumanism in this way, Schussler properly highlights its conceptual trajectory, which, according to her, "lies between the strong response of hyper-humanism and the onto-epistemological syncretic reconciliation of existence pertaining to critical posthumanism" (Schussler, 2024, p. 30).

Due to the limited scope of this paper, I won't endeavor to thoroughly analyse the relationship between transhumanism and critical (or cultural) posthumanism. Considering the paper's main goal, it will suffice to note that weak transhumanism's refusal to understand the human condition only from the perspective of the humanist paradigm of thought (which seeks an ultimate ideality, while simultaneously accepting the posthumanist notion that human existence is closely entangled with the ever-changing state of the world, and is thus itself perpetually changing) much more adequately adheres to the nature of (post)modern anti-metaphysical science, which is marked by the aim of "eternal creation". Furthermore, it provides the conditions for a much more adequate (i.e., not as internally contradictory) description of transhumanist anthropology; it recognizes and emphasizes the fact that no horizon of ideality or perfection should ever be identified in the transhumanist paradigm of thought, while stating that the goal of transhumanism as a practical project is not the creation of the perfect human as some specific entity (as it would simply be impossible without such a horizon), but rather only the encouragement of the human towards a perpetual experimental self-creation—or self-transformation enabled by the emerging scientific and technological possibilities.

However, such explication of the transhumanist paradigm of thought does not completely eliminate the inner tension that is characteristic of it (including its "weak" type); the same tension that is also typical—as was made clear by the analysis provided in this paper—of the category of Nietzsche's overhuman. This prompts a further line of questioning: If humans are destined to eternally remake themselves creatively, is the term "transhumanism" still an accurate (and expedient) description of the nature of human existence? If we were to assume that the interplay between humans and technology has essentially existed since time immemorial, and that it empowers us to treat ourselves, the humans, as beings that, in Sorgner's terms, have always been cyborgs, would it be correct to treat our current existential condition as something exceptional, let alone requiring particular terms—specifically, the term "transhumanism"—to identify it? The controversy between Bostrom and Sorgner undoubtedly helps us better understand not only Nietzsche's philosophy, but the entire field of transhumanism studies, in which, unlike fifteen years ago when this controversy arose, a new question is being raised, one that still relates to the category of *der Übermensch*—only this time not in respect of its meaning, but rather the relevance of the scientific and technological processes that humanity today is witnessing.

Conclusions

To summarise what was stated in this paper, it should first be noted that in assessing Nietzsche's theoretical relevance to transhumanist thought, we will inevitably face the problem of understanding and defining transhumanism itself. At the core of this problem

lies the question of how transhumanism should be understood—as a project oriented towards a specific goal, the ideal of which is not merely an empirically empty abstraction, but one which has a more or less clearly defined form of empirical perfection, or as a project structured by neither any sort of finite notion of perfection, nor any empirical content that embodies this idea. Bostrom and Sorgner are the sort of thinkers whose insights on transhumanism clearly demonstrate that more than one perspective with regard to understanding transhumanism is viable, and, in turn, that there is more than one explication of the relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and transhumanist thought. Bostrom's insights allow us to understand that Nietzsche's philosophy cannot really be treated as being of particular importance to transhumanism if we contemplate transhumanism in categories of defined practical means or specific empirical ideals. In their own right, Sorgner's insights can be considered undoubtedly valuable, not only because they open the way towards a specific interpretation of transhumanism (the concept of weak transhumanism) and demonstrate that Nietzsche can nevertheless be treated as an especially important thinker in the context of transhumanist thought (especially considering the ontological status of this project), but also because it opens a theoretical pathway for the formation of a conceptually more coherent idea of transhumanism. Bearing all this in mind, it should be stated that the controversy between Bostrom and Sorgner should nevertheless be primarily viewed, not as a radical theoretical contraposition of two prominent transhumanist thinkers, but rather as a mutual conceptual complement, allowing for a better understanding of both Nietzsche's philosophy and the main challenges faced by the scholars in the field of transhumanism studies.

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THE CASE FOR ENHANCEMENT AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT: FOUCAULT, SORGNER, AND TRANSHUMANISM

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Abstract

This article addresses the philosophical tensions between Enlightenment ideals, particularly Kantian concepts of dignity and autonomy, and the evolving field of transhumanism. Kant's belief that human dignity originates from rational autonomy and the capacity for self-governance sets a foundation for Enlightenment humanism, which posits that humans hold an exceptional place among beings. Contrasting this, Michel Foucault's critique of Enlightenment humanism challenges the notion of a stable human essence, viewing "man" as a historically contingent construct subject to reinterpretation, particularly in the context of transhumanist enhancement. The discussion then extends to transhumanist ambitions, which aim to augment human capacities through technology but face significant questions about whether such enhancements uphold or redefine traditional values of dignity and autonomy. A central focus is Stefan L. Sorgner's posthumanist critique, where he proposes "fictive autonomy" as a useful social construct rather than an inherent human quality, questioning whether autonomy can remain unchanged in a technologically enhanced future. Drawing on a Foucauldian perspective, this article examines both classic transhumanism and Sorgner's adaptation, asking if either approach can genuinely reconcile with Enlightenment principles or if they risk destabilizing them. Through this lens, the article proposes that Foucauldian critique may offer a productive alternative for examining human enhancement without succumbing to contradictions inherent in the transhumanist project. Ultimately, I suggest that transhumanism, while promising to expand human potential, might need a redefined ethical framework that embraces contingency, finitude, and a revised understanding of autonomy beyond its Enlightenment origins.

Keywords

Dignity, autonomy, Enlightenment, enhancement, Transhumanism.

Introduction

While transhumanist philosophers usually agree on the need for human enhancement, the reasons for it are quite dispersed. For Nick Bostrom enhancement aims to improve the human condition by expanding its capacities beyond their current biological limitations and eventually achieving the posthuman condition. This view relies on the idea of human evolution as something that can be purposefully directed and it is currently upheld as an ethical motif aiming to reduce human suffering, improving happiness and eventually achieving the so called "good life". For other transhumanist thinkers, like Max More, enhancement is understood under the term of "extropy" which emphasizes the ideas of

progress, self-transformation and mastery over oneself. Instead of focusing exclusively on our biological limitations, More emphasizes the importance of autonomy and ultimately freedom. Enhancement, particularly through the advantageous use of modern technology, is a means for human beings to become truly free.

Besides all the ethical challenges these proposals may arise, there is still a bigger question to be answered. Since Bostrom recognizes that transhumanism finds its philosophical roots in Enlightened philosophy (Bostrom, 2005b, pp. 2-3), it would be only fair to resort back to those texts that made transhumanist thought possible. It is also important to take into consideration contemporary critiques of such Enlightened philosophy, because it may also affect how transhumanism ought to be considered. For this, we raise the concern for Foucauldian critique of the Enlightenment and the implications it may have for transhumanism. What one first encounters are the role the image of man plays both in Enlightened philosophy and transhumanist thought.

A very important idea Immanuel Kant poses is that man, insofar as it is rational, it has a unique dignity which separates him from the rest of the world:

> The fact that the human being can have the 'I' in his representations raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth. Because of this he is a *person*, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person —i.e., through rank and dignity an entirely different being from *things*, such as irrational animals with which one can do as one likes. (Kant, 2006, p. 15).

By this same reasoning, Kant appeals to the notion of autonomy that inherently derives from human dignity. This autonomy is exercised through the free use of reason, and it is a state that every human ought to achieve; that is, we should use reason in order to abandon our self-incurred state of minority (Kant, 1999a, p. 17). This strongly correlates with the transhumanist idea of overcoming our limitations and Bostrom himself quotes the same Kant passage when referring to the importance of rationality within our modern culture (Bostrom, 2005b, p. 4). While we cannot debate the importance of Kantian thought that can still be felt to this day, we still face the problem of human exceptionalism and if enhancement is to be considered as a normative force in our contemporary horizon.

The reasons we find to consider enhancement as a moral obligation are debated to this day. For bioconservative thinkers such as Habermas, enhancement in the form of genetic modification during embryonic stage is a direct threat to human autonomy (Habermas, 2004); for Fukuyama, on the other hand, technological intervention supposes a loss of human dignity insofar as genetic modification may eventually lead to a dystopic future in which plurality is suppressed in the name of progress (Fukuyama, 2004). Whether we agree or not with the bioconservative stance, the question still arises: Does enhancement necessarily attempt against autonomy or dignity?

As we stated earlier, transhumanism seems to rely on a certain human dignity, but this dignity can be enhanced. Bioconservatism, on the other hand, also relies on human dignity but sees it as something stable that should not be transgressed. To attempt against human dignity is to attempt against the very idea of man, but this does not represent a problem insofar as humans are a "work-in-progress" (Bostrom, 2005b, p. 4).

Different accounts of the human and transhumanism can be found in S. L. Sorgner's seminal work on Nietzsche's ideas being influential in the formation of transhumanist thought. Nietzschean thought, in this sense, also attempts against the idea of human dignity

when advocating for the rise of Overhuman, something which also aligns with More's idea of self-mastery. So how is it possible to, at the same time, coincide with bioconservatism and Nietzschean philosophy? Sorgner makes a strong case in favor of a Nietzschean transhumanism; he acknowledges the similarities that Nietzsche and Bostrom may have when stating that "both transhumanists and Nietzsche hold a dynamic view of nature and values" (Sorgner, 2009, p. 29).

In my view, while recognizing that the efforts made by Sorgner are very important towards a notion of enhancement that does not rely on dignity, still holds an enlightened view of autonomy which depends at the same time of Kantian dignity. What I will try to show in this article is of a double nature: first, to show how classic transhumanism seems to contradict the ethics that derive from their very own notion of human dignity, particularly analyzing the possibility of what is known as the "posthuman"; and secondly, to show how Sorgner utilizes Nietzsche's philosophy to uphold autonomy in a Kantian manner. For this, the first section of this article occupies itself exclusively on classic transhumanism and its inherent contradiction of the categorical imperative, particularly focusing on Bostrom and Savulescu's ideas of enhancement which would necessarily lead to moral enhancement. The second section is devoted to proposing Foucauldian thought as an alternative to the problem of dignity and autonomy; for this, Sorgner's philosophy is particularly useful, but not radical enough. I will try to show how his proposal of negative freedom as the ideal to pursue through enhancement is also conflicted with Nietzschean thought insofar as the enhancement of morality is also problematic within Nietzsche's own philosophy.

My intentions in this article are not to prove any wrongdoing in classic transhumanism or Sorgner's own take on transhumanism. What I aim for in this text is to show the problems transhumanist enhancement may have when conceived in a certain Enlightened manner, while also proposing the Foucauldian critique of Enlightenment as a possible way out of these philosophical challenges. Though this last proposal seems ambitious for it to just be mentioned in one sole section of an article, I hope to have brought forward a possible way of conceiving transhumanism considering the Nietzschean influence of Foucault and his critique of Enlightenment.

Dignity, Autonomy, and the Posthuman

If a certain philosophical worldview employs terms such as the "posthuman," then it is also necessary to examine what human element remains on that posthuman. What are the conditions of possibility for this posthuman? For Bostrom human nature is "dynamic, partially human-made, and improvable" (Bostrom, 2005a, p. 213). Argentinian philosopher Andrés Vaccari shows how this mere descriptive statement is implausible:

> Humanity will alter its own nature only on the provision that it does not alter the conditions of its becoming-posthuman. It is possible that greater capacities (physical, intellectual, emotional) might cause posthumans to hold different values from our own, prompting them to lead DE [Directed Evolution] in an unforeseen direction; yet the very capacity for rational self-determination must remain unchanged (2019, p. 200)

What this means is that the proclaiming of the overcoming of human nature through technological enhancement towards the posthuman state requires a certain fixed idea of the human: the capacity of overcoming itself and the power to self-determination through

rational thinking which, once again, alludes to the autonomous self. Literary critic Neil Badmington makes this case very clear: "It seems to me that many are a little too reluctant to attend to what remains of humanism in the posthumanist landscape" (2003, p. 15). This reluctance can only mean two things: we are either not willing to accept the consequences of the death of Man and all that this entails—such as the loss of the normative power of autonomy and dignity—or we are just too excited to stop for a minute and look back at our own steps. Either way, the implications are not yet quite clear.

On Dignity and Autonomy

As we saw earlier, for Kant dignity is granted when the individual is capable of saying the "I," which is what separates him from irrational beings. From dignity stems autonomy, the capability of exercising one's own right to self-determination. This self-determination, though, has a certain normativity to it, namely, that the rational being must undertake the mission of abandoning his state of "minority". According to Kant, "minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another" (1999a, p. 17) and that minority is self-incurred when the subject remains a minor due to his own lack of resolution or courage. Hence, is the duty of the rational subject to overcome his self-incurred minority.

One of the first things we must unveil is the intrinsic relationship between dignity and autonomy. Is autonomy determined by the possession of dignity? Are they independent of each other? The former seems to be the Kantian disposition of autonomy dependent on (1) the possession of rationality and (2) the normative use of it. This mere assessment of rationality is what gives human nature its character, namely, that rationality gives human dignity and, hence, autonomy. In a similar fashion, echoing Kant, Michael Hauskeller states that

> Human reason is primarily not a tool for the construction of theories about the world, but essentially and eminently *practice oriented*, and it is our ability to live by this reason and to give it as much room as possible that marks us out as humans and make us special. (2016, p. 76)

As a self-aware autonomous subject, we recognize our own finitude, and this finitude implies that we are fundamentally limited. Intuitively, the finite subject might want to do things that are beyond the scope of its capacities, and when those things that were formerly beyond our reach become available, we can stablish that it is effectively an increase in autonomy because the subject can now perform functions that were outside their agential capacities. For Bostrom, this also represents an increase in dignity: "Our Dignity as a Quality would in fact be greater if some of our capacities were greater than they are" (2008, p. 128). Drawing upon the theorization made by Aurel Kolnai, Bostrom distinguishes Dignity as a Quality in contrast with Human Dignity or "Menschenwürde," the former being a sort of Aristotelian ethics of virtue, and the latter being characterized in the same way we have thus far: dignity in a Kantian manner (Bostrom, 2008).

The link between autonomy and Dignity as a Quality is quite clear, but Bostrom does not elaborate on dignity as *Menschenwürde*, which means that he hasn't elaborated on the repercussions of an increased autonomy in our human nature. At face value, the augmentation of autonomy and Kantian dignity are quite compatible: we are exercising our autonomy in order to become *more* autonomous, which aligns with the idea of humanity as

a "work-in-progress" (Bostrom, 2005b, p. 4). As an increase in dignity, one could argue that enhancements that would benefit our range of action are also morally desirable. This seems to be the basis for the normativity of enhancement.

Bostrom argues the idea that

> The enhancements that transhumanists advocate—longer healthy lifespan, better memory, more control over emotions, etc. — would not deprive people of the capacity for moral agency. If anything, these enhancements would safeguard and expand the reach of moral agency. (Bostrom, 2004)

On the other hand, Julian Savulescu defends the idea that cognitive enhancements are desirable insofar as cognitive enhancement is an enhancement on rationality which is a necessary step towards achieving a good life:

> Cognitive capacities are the required for deployment of any kind of instrumental rationality—the capacity to reliably identify means to one's ends and projects. Better cognition means better access to information about one's surroundings and about one's own biology and psychology, as well as better abilities to use this information in rational planning […] So cognitive enhancement should promote well-being on all major theories of well-being. (Savulescu, Sandberg, & Kahane, 2011, p. 10)

In short, classic transhumanists advocate for enhancement as a means of augmenting our dignity and autonomy through the acquisition of an increased range of action in human agency, which translates as well in an increase of rationality. This increment in our rational capacity necessarily means that our morality is also enhanced.

This last assessment is very problematic. Let us take a look at how Bostrom defines enhancement in the first place: "Enhancement: An intervention that improves the functioning of some subsystem of an organism beyond its reference state; or that creates an entirely new functioning or subsystem that the organism previously lacked" (2008, p. 127). What this means is that enhancement takes place in two forms, namely, that (1) an organism sees its given capacities augmented in reference as to what it was before; or (2) an organism acquires a new set of functions that were previously not possessed by it.

If cognitive enhancement means an increase in dignity, autonomy and rationality, this means that an organism—in this case the human agent—sees an increment in this set of traits: it becomes *more* worthy, *more* autonomous and *more* rational. But is it possible for enhancement to provide dignity, autonomy or rationality to an organism that previously lacked any of them? If this was possible, then rationality is not sufficient reason to explain human dignity. If enhancement cannot provide these capacities to non-human agents—non-human insofar as they do not possess rationality—then (1) enhancement is very limited in what it can achieve and (2) rationality is unique and specific to humans.

The first option is—at least speculatively—feasible insofar as it would be a more inclusive ethical perspective, but the problem we presented earlier still remains: we have not yet effectively separated dignity from autonomy, rather we just extended it to non-human agents. One could wonder, though, what are these non-human agents? An embryo does not possess yet autonomy because it is not yet rational, but it will eventually become rational and acquire self-determination. A child is not yet completely rational, but it possesses a

certain degree of autonomy insofar as it can procure—in a limited manner—the means for its desire. Does this mean that we should cognitively enhance children, so they acquire full autonomy? If we were to enhance an agent that is not yet completely rational, then we are confusing dignity as a quality—as Bostrom would understand it—and human dignity. Dignity as a quality becomes dependent on the ideal of human dignity and autonomy is still subjected to dignity.

In second place, even if we ontologically commit to the idea of human dignity as given by rationality, enhancement, under the same Kantian parameters, is not morally desirable. On the contrary, it would be in violation of some formulations of the categorical imperative. We shall briefly go through some of these objections.

(1) "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law": In this case, the maxim for enhancement is as follows: "One should enhance one's own capabilities through technological means". In this sense, enhancement can be understood as an "imperfect duty" (Kant, 1999b, p. 73). Kant phrases a situation where a man with certain natural abilities might choose not to cultivate them in order to give himself to pleasure and if this neglection can be admitted as a universal law (1999b, p. 74). This neglection does not contradict nature, but it contradicts will because "a rational being necessarily wills that all the capacities in him be developed, since they serve him and are given to him for all sorts of possible purposes" (1999, p. 75). Though seemingly in accordance, transhumanism sees enhancement as a means to an end: to achieve a good life. In this sense, enhancement is understood in consequentialist terms and not as the mere will to cultivate oneself.

(2) "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (Kant, 1999b): Transhumanism, while presenting an altruistic ideal of enhancement where man is bettering himself with no particular means, contradicts the naturalistic disposition of rational beings. Kant states:

> Now there are in humanity predispositions to greater perfection, which belong to the end of nature with respect to humanity in our subject; to neglect these might admittedly be consistent with the *preservation* of humanity as an end in itself but not with the *furtherance* of this end (Kant, 1999b, p. 81)

What this means is that our disposition to perfection is an end to nature and not to man himself. If we accept the idea of enhancement, we would be enhancing ourselves for the sake of ourselves rather than for the sake of furthering nature's ends, these ends being humanity in itself. This case is quite clearly presented by Max More and his advocacy for the overcoming of nature (More, 2013b).

Following the previous line of reasoning, something as the desirable state to achieve, the posthuman, becomes a contradiction if one were to attribute a normative force to this becoming-posthuman. Instead of cultivating oneself, the posthuman demands to master human nature rather than the mastery over oneself through exercise. Vaccari even goes as far to say that transhumanists are not even capable of convincing us that the posthuman is a good or bad state to advocate for because of its lack of normative force (2019, p. 214). Having exposed these objections, classic transhumanism seems to be further in distress.

What we have presented thus far has to do with what Hughes describes as the "self-erosive" nature of transhumanism (2010) due to its own Enlightenment foundations. As we have shown, transhumanism strongly depends on a Kantian notion of reason which grants dignity and autonomy only to the human subject. But by its own assumptions it contradicts the foundations of the same Kantian philosophy from where it is inspired, namely, the ethical implications of the same philosophy from where they draft their theory of the subject and understanding of human nature. Our purpose is not to protect or preserve human nature from a Kantian standpoint but rather to propose a more nuanced approach towards enhancement. The question for dignity and autonomy being independent of each other is still open, but at least we were able to show that from a classic transhumanist perspective, this separation is improbable. What we shall attempt in the following pages is to present the philosophy of Stefan L. Sorgner as a counterproposal to classic transhumanism, particularly emphasizing his proposal of a "liberal ethics of fictive autonomy" (Sorgner, 2022, p. 47). While not a definitive answer, we shall try to understand transhumanism through a Nietzschean lens. In order to do so, we are required to add another step in our philosophical reasoning, namely, Foucauldian interpretations of Kant, Nietzsche and how would his ideas be of great use to understand transhumanism today.

Foucault and Sorgner: The Case for Enhancement and Fictive Autonomy

Having presented the inner tension transhumanism carries on from within its own philosophical roots, we shall hereby present another problem. In this case, the problem is not about Enlightened transhumanism, but rather, if transhumanism is conceivable beyond a rationalistic scope. As we showed earlier, transhumanism greatly depends on a fixed human nature and without a static idea of rationality as dignity and autonomy, the case for enhancement seems to be even weaker and weaker. But what if we were to approach enhancement from a genealogical point of view?

A certain genealogical way of thinking is presented in the concept of "problematization" where Foucault claims that "the work of philosophical and historical reflection is put back into the field of work of thought only on condition that one clearly grasps problematization not as an arrangement of representations but as a work of thought" (1984a, p. 390). Problematization insofar as critique of the present is "the proper task of a history of thought, as against a history of behaviors or representations: to define the conditions in which human beings 'problematize' what they are, what they do, and the world they live" (Foucault, 1990, p. 10). The form of this task according to Foucault is what he calls the "ontology of ourselves" and it implies that we as humans ought not to understand our own constitution through the limits of the necessary and reason, but rather an understanding of what is contingent:

> Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression (Foucault, 1984b, p. 45).

In the context of the discussion for human nature the transgression carried on by the ontology of ourselves means two things. Having in consideration our radical finitude, there is no means possible to achieve a state of infinitude, like transcending the body-mind duality. Second of all, since transgression always implies a limit, when something is transgressed it must necessarily create a new limit. Since limits are always contingent, then any possible transgression carried out by—for example—enhancement must remain contingent.

What Foucault signals to us, in a rather prominently genealogical tone, is that this transgressive attitude of modernity is to be understood not tied to a certain historical epoch, but as a new disposition towards the critical endeavor of philosophy. In this sense, we find several new accounts of understanding old Enlightened notions applied in our contemporary context. Transhumanism is one of many. This critical attitude towards enlightened transhumanism can be found in recent literature such as Sorgner's seminal essay on Nietzsche as a precursor of transhumanism (2009). More recently, British filmmaker and philosopher Alexander Thomas while discussing morphological freedom, he says something rather interesting in a very camouflaged Foucauldian manner:

> The transhumanist concept of 'morphological freedom' is an attempt at an 18th-century *solution* to a 21st-century *condition*. It draws on very Enlightenment assumptions that require a radical rethink if value pluralism is to have any chance of survival. (Thomas, 2024, p. 130)

But what are the conditions of possibility for such a radical thinking? Certainly, advocating for the overcoming of nature requires us, paradoxically, to maintain a certain nature. Max More in his—quite heavily oedipal—letter to Mother Nature does a similar gesture to what Kant proposes in the form of abandoning minority, while claiming that she—Mother Nature—has led us astray:

> What you have made us is glorious, yet deeply flawed. You seem to have lost interest in our further evolution some 100.000 years ago. Or perhaps you have been biding your time, waiting for us to take the next step ourselves. Either way, we have reached our childhood's end. We have decided that it is time to amend the human constitution (More, 2013a, p. 449).

But as we have previously shown, it appears that in order to overcome nature, we need not enhance ourselves but rather just identify the underlying problem of human nature which, again, is not solved by the normativity of the posthuman. Since dignity separates us from the rest of entities in the world, we are faced with the problem of what is outside the sphere of humanity. This is one of the main concerns of philosopher Maria Kronfeldner where she begs the question of human nature and its utility towards procuring well-being to those who have been historically relegated outside humanity. In this sense, she proposes two perspectives towards this problem: either abandoning or revisioning human nature (Kronfeldner, 2018, p. 232). Whatever the answer to this predicament may be, the importance lies in the question, on the problematization and critique of human nature. We can, therefore, through this incipient critique, just now start to ponder about the death of Man.

On Sorgner and the Problematization of Freedom

The case made by Sorgner is quite a particular one. As opposed to a static ideal of the human, Sorgner embraces what is known as the ontology of continual becoming (2022, p. 12) which implies "alethic" and "ethical nihilism". This means (1) that there is no truth and (2) there are no possible formal and normative moral judgments. The purpose for embracing such an ontology is the "dissolution of the *categorical* ontological special status of humans" (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 76).

As we saw earlier, it is rationality which grants dignity, and dignity manifests itself in autonomy. Any philosophy that longs for the removal of the human as exceptional first has to encounter this problematic. The problematization of human nature is closely related to the Foucauldian enterprise, it takes upon itself the arduous path of battling against the dominant humanistic tradition carried on for centuries. Here we must note first that according to Foucault, one must not confuse Enlightenment with Humanism: "This permanent critique of ourselves has to avoid the always too facile confusions between humanism and Enlightenment" (1984b, p. 43). The reason for this difference is that Foucault recognizes Enlightenment as the ethos of modernity, that ethos that invites us to perform the critique of ourselves.

Let's take a look again at the case of moral enhancement. The Kantian view of enhancement, which is implied by Bostrom and Savulescu, is that we become more worthy when subjected to enhancement. To be more worthy is to be more rational and an increment in rationality implies that we are able to make better decisions. This better decision-making is what makes us more moral. But again, what does this better decision making imply? Does this mean that, when enhanced, we are capable of conceiving more possible outcomes on each possible scenario? Or does it mean that in each situation our decisions will have the least harmful impact on the people surrounding the moral agent? Can it be both?

To have a better capability of decision making is always in reference to something else. The circumstances of the decision being made may vary, and the outcome of this decision will not always be the same under every circumstance. We can take the example of Prozac consumption made by Sorgner when discussing the possibility of enhancing emotions to promote morality. Here Sorgner shows that our morality is enhanced not by means of a solely rational manner, but rather that our emotions are also at play when making moral decisions (Sorgner, 2016/2020, pp. 22-23).

Still, the problem seems to be morality itself and its same Enlightened basis. This was one of the main criticisms put forth by Nietzsche when claiming that "people have always wanted to 'improve' human beings; for the most part this has been called morality" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 183) and that there are no moral facts (2006, p. 182). In this sense, even the discussion of enhancement—and the necessary increase in moral capacity inherent to it— seems to be a way to negate life.

Sorgner understands moral enhancement as "related to the reduction of direct harm done to individuals" (Sorgner, 2022, p. 78) instead of the classical Enlightened increase in rationality whose effects are an augmentation on moral decision making, and hence, autonomy. Still, Sorgner yet advocates for the ideal of autonomy, but rather a fictive autonomy with a Nietzschean influence (2022, p. 6). He upholds autonomy as an idea to be defended because of its effectiveness in organizing societies, and it serves him to defend his thesis of negative freedom as a wonderful achievement (2022, p. 15).

According to Sorgner, moral enhancement can manifest itself in the form of an enhanced emotionality or by cognitive enhancement, and both of these can be achieved through bioenhancement or educational means. The problem here is, if we accept the normativity of freedom as interwoven with morality, that is, that every enhancement is supposedly done under the careful thought of reducing harm towards oneself or the other as a means to increase negative freedom, then we are engaging in what Foucault recognizes as the neoliberal paradigm.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics* Foucault states that disciplinary control is instrumental for liberal governance (2008, p.66). What this means is that control is always in operation when a subject finds itself free and that control is not necessarily the opposite to freedom under the neoliberal government, but rather a product of power relations (2008, p.67). This has two implications: (1) that freedom is not inherent to the human subject and (2) that freedom is in itself a power relation. As we showed earlier, the ontology of ourselves mainly consists in the analysis of contingent current power relations; so, freedom under the neoliberal regime has to be understood in these terms if we wish to start critiquing our humanistic heritage.

If we accept the close relationship between morality and freedom that Sorgner seems to draw upon, moral enhancement seems highly implausible. First of all, Nietzsche already showed that the will to enhance humanity is served upon the basis of morality. But if morality is related to freedom, then both morality and freedom are products of contingent power relations. In this sense, it may seem strange to advocate for an enhancement of power relations.

In the case we were to accept a Foucauldian idea of transgression, then these power relations are not something to be overcome. What is to be overcome then, is the neoliberal form of government, which is something that Sorgner seemingly does not address. Even if we accept the power dichotomy of constraint/empowerment, to advocate for a unilateral enhancement as empowerment, we are engaging in a form of positive freedom as described by Isaiah Berlin (1969, p. 178), as in opposition to the wonderful negative freedom.

It's not odd that classic transhumanist thinkers such as Bostrom and More actually advocate for the advancement of the market as a means of procuring novel technological advancements so human race can achieve its true freedom. Transhumanism, along neoliberalism, find their roots in rationalism, and it may be open to debate that an enhancement in rationality—and hence, morality—is thought in terms of decision-making within a capitalistic framework.

Conclusion

Some questions still remain open. If classic transhumanism is not coherent with its own proclaimed philosophical roots, then we should actively search for another alternative capable of conciliating technological development and the human agent. In this sense, Sorgner's account of transhumanism is excellently useful to face new technologies and a new repurposing of what it means to be human.

But yet, Sorgner appeals to Enlightened ideals of autonomy, and treating it as a mere fictive element does not make a practical effect sufficient enough to claim that it is a new form of autonomy or dignity. His Nietzschean perspective is then utilized to argue in favor of Enlightened enhancement. As we showed, Foucault calls us not to confuse humanism with Enlightenment, but in this case what Sorgner presents is the case for Enlightened thought, rather than the Enlightened attitude as Foucault understands it. Having considered

this, we must ask ourselves the same philosophical questions of human dignity or autonomy in a Foucauldian manner: Is it possible to enhance power relations? If our negative freedom is the byproduct of a relational interface between government and governed, then what are we supposed to do as moral agents? It seems to me that enhancement in general is not an effective answer to the world's problems, even if we commit ourselves to emotional or moral enhancement so that it changes our perspective towards global climate change or structural violence, we still find ourselves constraint by the contingent limits of our political landscape and what is upheld in this epoch as valuable.

One may accept an ontology of continual becoming, but this also means that eventually a fictive autonomy is also to be replaced at some point in time, and our task as Enlightened critics —critics rather than thinkers— is to account for these changes instead of conforming to the current mode of governance. In my opinion, Sorgner is a crucial author who opened a pandora's box of philosophical challenges and we should address them in a critical manner.

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OUR NIETZSCHEAN FREE RIDERS

Frédéric Balmont

Abstract

The concept of the free rider, defined in the 1960s by the economist Mancur Olson, could find a moral philosophy application in the relationship between transhumanism and Nietzscheanism. Such a relationship is diverse. Some transhumanist thinkers or actors, not the least being such as Max More and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, more or less explicitly claim ownership of Nietzschean thought, notably through the concepts of Power, Creation, Overhuman, Life, etc. However, if we focus on Nietzschean opposition to transhumanism (e.g. that of Arnaud Sorosina and, in a way, Jean-Michel Besnier), supported by patterns and concepts equally specific to the German philosopher such as True World, Resentment, Amor Fati, Last Man, it becomes possible to uncover a paradox. The moral cost of assent to transhumanism, for these Nietzscheans, is unacceptable, insofar as nihilistic dynamics would be a necessary, even necessary and sufficient condition, for the construction of its imaginary as well as its societal thrust. Yet, if the promised fruits of these technoscientific advances from the NBIC/BANG convergence continue to occur, these originally adverse Nietzscheans would have no difficulty in shamelessly harvesting them. This consistent amorality associated with an always-precise examination of the effects and possible uses of biotechnologies—not necessarily for longevity but rather for their Great Health—would place these Nietzscheans on the side of pragmatic transhumanism. As a result, they are poor fellow travelers, but harmless objectors. Finally, there remains the question, always perilous among Nietzscheans, of politics: that of the potential effects of the production and political uses of technosciences on expressions of the Will to Power.

Keywords

Free rider, nihilism, great health, politics, spiritual machines.

Introduction: Battlefield on Earth, Battlefield for Earth, Nietzschean Transhumanism as a Strategic Issue

It is still a battlefield. The academic *disputatio* surrounding Nietzschean concepts and the possibility of their integration into a transhumanist perspective remains lively. Even if we can learn from sophisticated and subtle analyses of Nietzschean legacy in transhumanist thought (Tuncel, 2017), even if we can see uses for Nietzschean tools when it comes to elaborating or analyzing a "weak transhumanism" (Schussler, 2024; Sorgner, 2017; 2016/2020), some, transhumanists or not, still refuse to accord more than a superficial or marketing connection (Bostrom, 2005). So, can transhumanists appropriate concepts such as "life," "power," "creation," "overhuman"? Alternatively, are they doomed to be only associated with pejorative Nietzschian terms such as *Resentment*, *Backworldsmen*, *Last Man*, and so on?

The French philosopher Arnaud Sorosina (2020) holds this negative point of view. In a text published for a medical journal, written in an assumed fierce Nietzschean style, he expresses contempt towards transhumanists, and directly attacks Stefan Lorenz Sorgner. This spectacular and wicked rhetoric, not as bright as that of Nietzsche, nevertheless produces its effect. It is both fun and provoking. However, the other side of the coin is that it awakens suspicion and leads us to adopt a tactical approach. On the one hand, there already are many deep analyses of Nietzschean transhumanism's problem. On the other hand, Sorosina enters into a sort of game.

As a speaker for the French Transhumanism Association since 2019, I can attest that, in our institution, and more generally in France, declared transhumanists ignore Nietzsche. I don't know if it has a cognitive bias, because we have no academic statistics, but we are aware that the majority of those who like the German philosopher—often literary people, psychologists and philosophers—are hostile to transhumanism.

So, how to deal with this problem? First of all, we have to emphasize that transhumanism is classically defined as a cultural and philosophical movement that proposes the usage of science and technology to improve the human condition[1]. More than other philosophies, transhumanism is a structural coupling between techno-scientific advancements and reflections on the human becoming, with an assumed aim of enhancement. Certainly, we can find some pure technicians or consumers that just use or build transhumanist devices or attitudes, without these being based an explicit philosophical work; in the same way as we certainly can find some philosophers solely interested in theoretical issues—but as a pioneering movement, transhumanism is hybrid by nature. That is one more reason to consider Sorosina's game in a pragmatic and strategic way.

Could this be a problem for the movement? Not the perspectives which validate a Nietzschean transhumanism—most forces are welcome in that great family, even if we may feel bothered, sometimes, by the aspect "beyond good and evil," which could give to the movement an even more controversial image than we already struggle with. That is a common aspect of Nietzscheanism: there are many durable misunderstandings—maybe deserved in terms of style and content. Both Nietzscheanism and transhumanism, in the eyes of the general public, could be easily associated with eugenism, elitism, even pre-fascism. Despite the potential use of technologies for fascist goals, I believe that transhumanism, as a consistent thought, remains distinct from fascism due to its optimistic conceptions of body, mind, freedom, and it's so-to-speak eschatological drivers. Here is not the place to develop this aspect, other than by mentioning the leading thinkers (Hughes, 2004; Kurzweil, 2005; Pearce, 1995; Roux & Coeurnelle, 2016). On Nietzsche's side, we can mention Georges Bataille (Bataille, 1937) and Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 1962), both of whom produced authoritative antifascist readings of the German philosopher.

The way to go is not by trying so hard to demonstrate that Nietzsche's concepts can serve transhumanism. It is a better tactic to focus on the Nietzschean criticisms, and show that, whether relevant or not, they are harmless. The inefficiency of critics with regard to Nietzschean positions has led these Nietzscheans to behave like free riders of transhumanism. If we prefer another image, we could say illegal streamers.

[1] "Transhumanism is a philosophical and intellectual movement that advocates the enhancement of the human condition by developing and making widely available new and future technologies that can greatly enhance longevity, cognition, and well-being". Transhumanism (2024, October 25). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Transhumanism&oldid=1253366209.

I will first analyze some of the decisive positions of Sorosina and Jean-Michel Besnier (hedonism; power of life; and the symbolic level). Secondly, I am going to adopt a rough and rude classic transhumanism and expose *our* genealogy and *their* pragmatic transhumanism. Thirdly, I will challenge the idea of Nietzschean anti-transhumanist politics.

Sorosina and the Living-dead

The thing that immediately struck us when we read Sorosina is the methodological ambiguity: is Sorosina speaking in his own name as the Nietzschean he is, or does he adopt the role of the shepherd of the Nietzschean approach? We do not really know if he claims that Nietzsche would have spoken in this way if he had dealt with transhumanism issues; or if he pretends that every consistent Nietzschean, today, must endorse his thesis on the subject. In his own words, he engages in "philosophy-fiction" (Sorosina, 2020, p. 8).

However, what is more important is that—in huge contrast with the hammering style of the text[2]—nothing in his discourse is a real objection to transhumanist practices. For example, with regard to hedonism his key argument that confines transhumanists to the frantic escape from suffering and death is largely a straw man. There is David Pearce with his hedonistic imperative, and it is true that many transhumanists look for wellbeing and reverse aging. At the limit, one could grant Sorosina—even if the conception of suffering that he attributes to transhumanists is debatable—that suffering is generally not valued and that the reason is to be found in the works and constraints of Mother Nature. From then on, indeed, it is unlikely that the simple technical hybridization of man makes him a Nietzschean eager for painful and creative experiences, creative because painful. The more classical vision of the fight against suffering, a reactive vision according to Sorosina, has no *a priori* reason to disappear because of these transhumanist techniques. Nevertheless, transhumanists advocate freedom and choice first. If someone finds that hedonism and even longevity is boring, or that it traps him in his idiotic identity, preventing him from becoming who he is—or more than who he is—it is not a problem: he could configure his neural implant in such a way as to intensify all his sensations, to excite his amygdala, to provoke synesthesia or psychedelic hallucinations. He might try something more dangerous: he might try gene transfer with his partner, as a Valentine's Day gift: "Sweetheart, please give me one of your beautiful genes with CRISPR-Cas9, and let us see what happens[3]!" He can implant a cancerous liver like the passionate physician in Lars Von Trier's *Riget* (Abrahamsen et al., 1994-2022). These are certainly examples of artistic Great Health. Such transhumanist practices could be associated with it. Is this not an example of the capacity for a living being to intensify its life by integrating a wound, by the feeling of a lesion overcome and, in a certain way, increasing its power? So, let's continue on this path. One can also explore other becoming-animal. We can mention Laval-Jeantet et al. (2011) performance, *May the Horse Live in Me*, as an example of transhumanism in action. The artist wears a horse leg prosthetic and injects into herself a serum based on a horse's blood. Consequently, she can experience, in a way, a sort of hybridization, a sort of becoming-horse, lived in her entire mind/body system: the stand, the locomotion, proprioception and sensory-motor reconfigurations, even the hormonal mind and the emotional consequences of the serum.

[2] "… the fewer noble illuminations one has to give substance to a weak thought, the more one needs to invent an ideologically fantasized pedigree... ." (Sorosina, 2020, p. 8).
[3] To follow this track: Balmont (2021, February, 4).

This hedonistic objection is largely cross-eyed. It does not target transhumanists but rather an existential laziness. A laziness that the Nietzschean detects in himself. If they would argue that such exploratory and over-hedonistic practices are anecdotic and insignificant, that they are not viable ways in which to appropriate technological possibilities, they would confess overall that they are maybe not strong enough to resist the wellbeing temptation, nor creative enough to imagine new fields. A minimalist transhumanism, allowing care and longevity, even seems a necessary condition for those who feel like continuing to explore this porosity to otherness. Indeed, suffering implies, at a minimum, living and being physiologically strong enough to do more than drag out one's agony. We are talking about transhumanism and not just restorative medicine, because some aspects of longevity and repair sometimes involve advanced technologies, using all the resources of nuclear physics, genetic engineering, synthetic biochemistry, AI and the resources of the cybernetic approach to life. Sorosina (2020) plays a good game of not contextualizing when he indicates that "This is why Nietzsche praises suffering, certainly not out of ascetic dolorism, but to the extent that suffering participates in the ontological economy which guarantees the ethical coherence of *amor fati*" (2020, p. 12). Sorosina refuses to integrate the real possibilities of his time's technology because he is so dogmatic and decontextualized. From then on, he seems to fall into this ascetic dolorism that he claimed to denounce.

The weirdest argument, constituting the core of all Sorosina's perspective, is that of Life. Sorosina claims that transhumanists want to enhance life through technologies that are fundamentally outside the norms of life. Non-living stuff to replace living stuff, non-living lives to falsely prolong real life. In other words, the extended life of transhumanists is a devitalized life. Therefore, obviously, the paradigmatic transhumanist technology, for Sorosina, is mind uploading.

It does not matter that mind uploading is just one of the many orientations of transhumanism. For Sorosina, when medicine oversteps the so-called norms of life, it is the dark side, it becomes transhumanism. Extrapolated from Nietzsche, that supposed dynamic of life would have nothing to do with cybernetic modeling, or human-machine hybridization. There would be a wisdom and power of life, infinitely superior but alien to what transhumanists might call life. Is it really a Nietzschean approach of Life? Even if it is, is it convincing?

Gilles Deleuze, in his famous *Nietzsche et la Philosophie* (Deleuze, 1962), gave a Nietzschean definition of body. He said that, for Nietzsche, a body exists when forces are in a relationship to one another. Bodies are the result of a balance of power. The link between life and body is obvious, and it is explicit in Sorosina's text. First, we can observe that in Deleuze's view, bodies are not necessarily bodies of an animal or a human. For example, force can construct a social body. Maybe we can think of mechanical bodies. The tricky question is about body and life. Is every body a living body? Or is a living body only a kind of body? Is a linving body a kind of body necessarily supported or composed by living bodies? This leads us to the definition of life. Sorosina's one is very ambiguous. A kind of fragile principle, which can absorb certain medical devices, certain prostheses, but not others. No clear criteria are presented. Worse, Sorosina introduces disparate elements of philosophy and metaphysics:

> From this point of view, we take the measure of the intensification of life, from the Nietzschean point of view, according to the functions specific to life as it is defined in its phenomenological and not biological manifestations. The nature of life is to be a counter of activity which

> appropriates forces by digesting them in order to instill in them a meaning and a value by virtue of a singular affectivity. (Sorosina, 2020, p. 9)

Further on, he introduces some gradients in Life:

> Nietzsche defends a diametrically opposed form of monism, since it is a vital monism that invites us to consider the physics of inert objects and the mechanics of technical objects as a proto-form of life, as life in the most infinitesimal state, in other words the least vital possible. (Sorosina, 2020, p. 9)

Instinctively, even transhumanists in fact might agree with such a consideration. However, scrutinizing every characteristic of Life makes it challenging to prove that pure biological structures must possess it, and even more challenging to prove that hybridization inherently devitalizes the living part. On the theoretical side, there is nothing like such a demonstration in Sorosina's text: he introduces Life rather like an axiom. On the concrete side, we have to examine the situation case by case, and we certainly have to hear what science can tell us about this. This method would allow for a more charitable reading of Sorosina.

In the game of the scientific approach to life we have one of the branches of cybernetics, embodied cognition by Francisco Varela. Varela asserted that nothing opposes artificial life, artificial consciousness (Castoriadis, 2003): the dynamic of living outside of biology, much to Sorosina's dismay. There was a notably famous debate on the subject between Castoriadis and Varela:

> FV: … Personally, I can perfectly envisage the construction, the development, by new cognitive schools, of technical objects that would be precisely full of emotion. They would then have to be designed on a non-computational model, that of a dynamic system, for example, by inseparably integrating history and its constraints, in such a way that intentionality and desire appear for these objects. Then they may not be passionate about Fermat's theorem but perhaps they will be passionate about other things... In any case, that is the whole challenge of new robotics, to have robots that want to do "good robot work". It is a challenge that exists today. At least the question is being asked.
>
> CC: Do you think this task is achievable?
>
> FV: In principle, yes.
>
> CC: Beyond trivialities, I mean.
>
> FV: Certainly, beyond trivialities. There remains an empirical problem, of course, but in principle I do not see the impossibility of having machines or technical objects where the impulsive or the emotional is linked to the cognitive in a way, I do not say identical, but analogous to that of the living … (Castoriadis, 2003, pp. 69-70)

Perhaps we could see a legacy between embodied cognition and the upcoming Yann LeCun JEPA model, as I tried to show recently (Balmont, 2024).

Ultimately, who can say that when humans and machines hybridize, it is the machine or the human who takes the upper hand? It may be case by case. Every man has to position

himself. We can think about prosthetics, brain-computer interfaces, and synthetic drugs. Is it preferable to die when we have a disease or an accident that reduces our quality of life? More precisely, if we consider that our post-traumatic life is worthless without the transhumanist technologies, but worthy with it—do we have to die just to respect the norms of life? We can immediately see the problem from an idealistic and abstract perspective of these norms. This is why Sorosina has difficulty convincing us: if some aspects of technologies would be beyond the norms of life, the fact that the remaining living part of the person can animate it makes Sorosina's objection very ineffective.

Besides, even if we accept this so-called Nietzschean concept of Life, the concept of exobiology known as Lyfe (Bartlett & Wong, 2020) would destabilize everyone. This concept can also be related to cybernetics, as researchers have constructed it to consider forms of life beyond Earth. Moreover, it can be useful in the examination of artificial life. The point is that with Lyfe we could reintroduce Sorosina's norms of Life inside other forms of living entities. Lyfe is another course of thought about non-biological life, for those who absolutely want to, that interpretation of Nietzsche's Life. With the alliance of Varela's perspectives and the Lyfe concept, rejecting both the possibility of artificial life and vitalizing hybridization can only be sustained by biological dogmatic conservatism or a narrow form of vitalism.

Now we can see that, by considering his text, Sorosina advances a metaphysical concept of Life, a very poetic vitalism. It's not a problem. But how can one reproach transhumanists for being sometimes a bit eccentric with mind uploading or simulated bodies, and presenting such esoteric stuff in return? How can he be so contemptuous and dogmatic?

Besnier Against the Automats

The whole question is therefore that of a transhumanist approach beyond the inert and the mechanical. Jean-Michel Besnier is more subtle. While he would certainly agree with many of Sorosina's proposals, he does not make the mistake of unilaterally pointing to biotechnologies or the cybernetic approach in biology. He does not fall into an overly esoteric vitalism under the fig leaf of phenomenology. If it needs phenomenological examination, it may be case by case. For Besnier, the fundamental problem is the contemporaries' fascination with calculation and automation. He promotes ambiguity, the symbolic level, and intersubjectivity. But he does not directly associate that symbolic level with life, because animals are alive without accessing the symbolic. He associates the symbolic with the human and *psyche*, and he suggests that computers do not access the symbolic level either. Because, for him, AI is just automatisms. Computers do not enter into the infinite exchange of symbols. Rather, they are made to offer a clear response.

It is not transhumanism itself, but rather the fascist potentials that arise from the alliance of technoscientific reductionism (simplification) and political nihilism (capitalism/economism)—manifested in an immoderate idolatry of the calculable—that worries Besnier:

> This is precisely how fascism finds its fulfillment: it makes freedom as permitted by language properly unthinkable, thanks to the ambiguity of its words, to the power of association of ideas that it translates, to the poetic enrichment of meanings, to the adjectives and adverbs that circumstantialize space and time, to the irony and creativity that play on the distance of semantic registers. (Besnier, 2012, p. 72)

However, his approach seems less cutting with regard to transhumanism. If he clearly finds mind uploading and immortality to be bullshit, vast sections of transhumanism are, for him, if not desirable, at least thinkable, such as aspects of longevity, advanced medicine, maybe morphological freedom. For Besnier (Le Figaro, 2024), human life is much more than functional physiology, but if we can preserve it, thanks to biotechnologies, he recently said why not? For him, the point is to avoid reducing humans and life to their physiological mechanics. Here, it is easy to see that Besnier's view allows us to use the distinction put forward by Sorosina (*Leib/Körper*) in a more consistent manner.

With Besnier's more moderate and precise approach, it is possible to distinguish the uses of transhumanism while giving ourselves the freedom to establish the genealogy of certain discourses, or even of the cultural and technoscientific movement as a whole. This symptomatic analysis not only leads to transhumanism but also goes beyond it, and even to earlier roots (besides, Besnier affiliates transhumanism with gnosis). For Besnier, man is fascinated by automatisms because he is exhausted. Exhausted by his fear of death, and therefore of life. And whoever says exhausted from living a human life, says exhausted from entering into the infinite exchange of symbols. Besnier (2013) links eroticism, life, symbolic language, desire... and death. This link between desire and death is classic, august. The whole question will then shift to knowing if death is the only valid form of finitude, if other forms of finitudes are not possible[4]. The question resembles that of Sorosina, but is, thus formulated, much more interesting.

Consequently, it is possible to read some of Sorosina's proposals in a more productive way especially those where he distinguishes self-abolition and self-annihilation, to conceive of this theoretical monster that is a non-living life: "Life seeks to heal itself by being reborn in a form that is initially partially alive (transhumanism) and ultimately non-living (posthumanism)" (Sorosina, 2020, p. 10). Sorosina's unilateral thesis falters because it becomes appropriate to consider the more sophisticated transhumanist approaches, defending hubris as an ontological overflow, as a power of expansion, improvement and creation, even more than of augmentation, extension and calculation: the famous porosity to otherness. Raphael Liogier (2023), in his book with the Nietzschean title *Khaos: La promesse trahie de la modernité*, develops such an approach which he describes as truly trans and truly humanist.

That's it for the surfacic transhumanist proposals. Let's do some genealogy.

Slave Engineers vs. Raised by Wolves Free Riders

In any case, these fierce Nietzscheans who are hostile to transhumanism believe that the predominant transhumanist mindset is one of "strong transhumanism". They see it as the mentality of the Last Man: hedonistic, fearing death, and suffering. Moreover, transhumanist activists can be seen as a kind of backworldsmen: rejecting human life, which they consider a disease, a contradiction between biological life and individual consciousness. That's my own position somehow: man is, in that Schopenhauerian mode, the one who does not have death in front of him—sometimes freezing, sometimes flying, sometimes fighting, sometimes dying—like animals. Man carries death within him, in his mind. He is the only living-dead in nature, struggling immensely to confront his grim destiny. Thus, he seeks escape in religion, alcohol, or foolish and risky acts—what I call "stunners". With these stunners, Man tries to hide from himself his fatal destiny, but he largely fails. And

[4] That's a big part of my main work: *Transhumanism: A Straw Dog Meditation* (2020).

now, there is an escape to the Singularity, a Singularity which is nearer and nearer—as the return of Christ. Thus, Sorosina mocks the philosophy of history of the transhumanists, a form of secularized progressive faith, an ersatz of eschatology. He recognizes there this great danger of modernity that Nietzsche pointed out. Let's agree with the last men, with nihilism, with the despisers of the given body, maybe with pseudo-Christianity[5] (even if transhumanist *pharmakon* can overcome nihilistic interpretations). If we can counter-argue on this basis, we will have a huge advantage: he who can do more can do less. At least we can understand that most transhumanists disgust these Nietzscheans. But here, there is a loop. A very concrete loop that wipesout their line of attack.

Due to its engineering aspect, transhumanism achievements are indeed material and of this world. Prosthetics are not magic; the Cloud is not Heaven; an artificial body could be a body. And this world is not in a backworld. It's there. These Nietzscheans can use it if they want, shamelessly. Use without participating, profit without working. Free riders raised by wolves: after all, what kind of slave morality would prohibit Nietzschean from using well-evaluated technologies simply because weak slaves created them? Slaves, crushed by the idea of the eternal recurrence, unsurprisingly believe in *progress* or the Singularity—whereas Nietzscheans *must* assume the eternal recurrence of transhumanist achievements, and *can* assume it while using transhumanist models and designs opportunistically.

Rather, Nietzschean must examine each transhumanist proposal in the context of their personal lives and current desires, to decide whether or not that proposal is right for them. This is what I call pragmatic transhumanism. In their texts, I have not seen anything theoretical (apart from sometimes crude dogmatism) that could contest this point.

It is largely enough. Nevertheless, we can deliver the final blow underlying the view that transhumanism is not just a discursive dispositive. It is integrated in an economic, industrial, and cultural machine. Markets guide research and accelerate development. So, while objectors can scorn the psychology and dynamics of transhumanism, if they buy, even occasionally, products from Google and Microsoft, or AI generated vaccines, the situation becomes laughable—perhaps with a great Nietzschean laugh. When it comes to combating an ideology and its concrete consequences, practical hypocrisy is less an admission of weakness than a way of feeding the Moloch. Spoiler alert: every Nietzschean I meet uses lots of GAFA technologies, sometimes regretting doing so, sometimes not. All agree with the use of lots of advanced medical dispositives. Here the game is over. Their hammers become paper hammers. Harmless adversaries.

To summarize: in theory, almost nothing; in practice, less than nothing.

The Great Politics Facing Reality

How can we think about possible forms of Nietzschean opposition to transhumanism that are truly effective and beyond niche academic controversy? Why should Nietzscheans organize collectively to oppose transhumanism instead of simply ignoring it? The only justification would be to consider that such a movement could affect the strength of the strong. Their dominance over reactive forces. This is the matter dealt with by Great Politics. It is true that the NBIC revolution can enhance reactive forces. We can think of alienation in virtual paradises that flatter an impoverishing hedonism, constantly renewing what pleases. Without confrontation with, and attraction by, something less pleasant or by

[5] For an examination of transhumanism as a gnosis or as a Joachimism see Deprez (2019). For an example of explicit pseudo-Christianity; see Balmont (2020, conclusion).

otherness, it is easy to fall into the trap of nothingness through the Same. But the deepest and most disturbing idea in these Nietzschean criticisms is that transhumanists, so-called despisers of life, are pursuing a dubious pleasure by dismantling life with their seductive artificial contraptions. Evoking Schopenhauer and the fact that suicide is a form of affirmation of the Will, Sorosina suggests that the nihilistic Schopenhauerian project could be accomplished in this world, no longer by mystical asceticism, but by substituting for this miserable life a form of life that is no longer life.

Always this essentialized bogeyman, this paradoxal concept of Life. I think Sorosina is wrong because of all previously exposed arguments. But I am tactically going to work around them once more.

Can the strength of the strong be attained? Aren't the strong, strong enough to always become stronger? When everyone uses algorithms, screens, Google services, and so on, can the strong be strong enough to resist? They should be. Can the strong be poisoned by the thrust of the masses, and become weak? If so what's the best strategy to prevent development of the plague? This would directly refer to Callicles expedients, in the famous *Gorgias* by Plato (488c-488e). The impasse of the complaint of the strong towards the weak. But it also refers to Nietzsche's *Gay Science* aphorism "The things people call love": "At this point linguistic usage has evidently been formed by those who did not possess but desired. Probably, there have always been too many of these." (§14). I have always thought that this text could argue for the equality of pleasures, in order to protect the strong from the weak. Isn't it paradoxical with regard to Nietzsche and the neo-feudal image that he often carries?

But then, how can one avoid merely fantasizing about political action? How not to simply whimper in one's corner? One must engage in politics, commit oneself to minor political schemes. One must consent to party discipline, thereby expending one's energy in such cesspools. All these things are unthinkable for a strong and free Nietzschean. We can imagine religious oppositions, "deep-ecology" oppositions, etc., but not really effective militant Nietzschean opposition. Giroux (2003) would support this point based on the unity of form and content in Nietzsche's Great Politics topics.

Last and least point: are the current global elites Nietzschean? It seems to be the case if we consider that such elites make the masses work for them, the very few. However, their attitude towards transhumanism is somewhat positive, so contradicting Sorosina's positions.

Dangerous Nietzschean anti-transhumanist policy does not seem to be emerging. This is not very serious because, as we have seen previously, it does not really have internal motivations.

Conclusion: do we Practice Witchcraft?

Most of the critiques that Nietzscheans hostile to transhumanism construct are relevant in some respects, whether they target strong transhumanism or what they believe to be the dominant sentiment within the movement. However, many of them are either ill-adjusted or squinty, and lack the ability to inspire meaningful action. Unless one assumes a dubious metaphysical trinket, the heart of Nietzsche's argument around the notion of Life—when it is not frankly contestable—is not decisive. These ones would be more inspired, based on their grand politics, to show themselves to be visionaries on the creative uses of the NBIC revolution, rather than to deplore the so-called neo-Christian transhumanist discourses which irritate them. In fact, these free riders of transhumanism are already doing this on the sly.

So, to the transhumanists who disdain Nietzsche, I would like to say: don't worry. Nietzscheans are harmless and contribute to the movement in their way. They can enhance transhumanist thinking and indeed have much to offer. As far free riders are concerned, let's share the wave with them.

But to the transhumanists who love Nietzsche, I would like to pastiche what Ford said to Bernard in *Westworld* (2016): "Ah, Mr Nietzsche's Overhuman. The problem, Stefan, is that what we do is so complicated. We practice witchcraft. We speak the right words. Then we create life itself… out of chaos. Nietzsche was a 19th century philosophical trickster. He can't help us now, Stefan. He would have us burned at the stake"[6].

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UNVEILING INFINITY: AI SIMULATIONS AND NIETZSCHE'S ETERNAL RECURRENCE

Damian Mingle

Abstract

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, the idea that all events in the universe will repeat themselves ad infinitum, presents a fascinating philosophical framework that challenges our understanding of time, existence, and meaning. This paper proposes to explore the intersection of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence with the burgeoning field of virtual realities and AI simulations, questioning whether artificial intelligence can offer a new perspective on this ancient philosophical dilemma. Through the lens of contemporary AI technologies, we delve into the potential for AI-driven simulations to mimic the cyclic nature of existence posited by Nietzsche, thereby providing a tangible model for conceptualizing eternal return. We begin by contextualizing Nietzsche's eternal recurrence within the philosophical discourse, highlighting its significance and the existential questions it raises. Subsequently, we examine the capabilities of current AI simulations and virtual realities, focusing on their ability to replicate complex systems and scenarios with high fidelity. The core of our inquiry investigates whether these simulations can embody the principle of eternal recurrence, not just as a theoretical concept but as an experiential reality for users within these virtual environments. Further, we contemplate the implications of such simulations on human understanding of time, causality, and the nature of our own existence. If AI can simulate a universe where Nietzsche's eternal return is observable, what does this mean for our perception of reality and our place within it? Could experiencing a simulated eternal recurrence influence our philosophical outlook, ethics, and values? Finally, we address the ethical considerations and potential existential ramifications of immersing humans in simulations that emulate the eternal recurrence. We invite a discussion on the balance between technological advancement and philosophical insight, pondering whether AI can truly capture the depth of Nietzsche's vision or if it merely offers a shadow of the profound existential contemplation he intended.

Keywords

Nietzsche, eternal recurrence, AI Simulations, Virtual Reality, existential philosophy.

Introduction

Opening Remarks

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of "eternal recurrence" proposes that all events in the universe perpetually repeat in an infinite cycle. This profound idea challenges conventional perceptions of time, existence, and meaning, prompting deep existential and metaphysical reflections (Nehamas, 1985). Nietzsche's eternal recurrence serves not merely as a

theoretical construct but as a radical test of one's ability to affirm life in its entirety, with all its triumphs and tragedies (Lampert, 1986). In parallel, the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) have introduced new paradigms for understanding and experiencing reality, raising intriguing philosophical questions (Floridi, 2014). This paper endeavors to bridge these domains, examining whether AI-driven simulations can provide a tangible model for conceptualizing Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. By integrating insights from cognitive science, ethics, and technology studies, we aim to offer a comprehensive analysis of how these simulations might replicate the cyclic nature of existence and its implications (Kahneman, 2011). Furthermore, we will highlight the ethical considerations and the broader philosophical impacts of immersing humans in such simulations.

Objectives and Thesis Statement

This paper explores the intersection of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence with AI simulations and virtual realities. By juxtaposing this timeless concept with contemporary AI advancements, we investigate whether AI-driven simulations can provide a tangible model for conceptualizing Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. The analysis draws on interdisciplinary insights from philosophers like David Chalmers and ethicists like Luciano Floridi, as well as cognitive science research on human-computer interaction. Furthermore, the paper will examine the ethical considerations and philosophical impacts of immersing humans in AI-driven simulations that emulate eternal recurrence, aiming to transform current philosophical and technological discourse (Turkle, 2011).

Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence

Philosophical Context

Friedrich Nietzsche, a towering figure in 19th-century philosophy, is renowned for his provocative ideas that challenge conventional thought (Ansell-Pearson, 1997). One of his most complex concepts is eternal recurrence, introduced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1961). This idea posits that all events in the universe recur infinitely in the same sequence, challenging linear notions of time and causality (Lampert, 1986). Eternal recurrence urges individuals to live in such a way that they would welcome the infinite repetition of their lives (Kaufmann, 1974). Nietzsche presents eternal recurrence through Zarathustra as a thought experiment, a profound test of one's ability to affirm life in its entirety, with all its joys and sufferings. Beyond *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche elaborates on this concept in *The Gay Science* (1974) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1998). In *The Gay Science*, he writes, "The greatest weight: —What if some day or night a demon were to sneak after you into your loneliest loneliness...Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus?" (p. 273). This reflection underscores the existential weight of eternal recurrence, urging individuals to live as if their lives would repeat endlessly (Kaufmann, 1974).

Nietzsche's thought emerged amid cultural and intellectual upheaval, reacting against deterministic Enlightenment frameworks and the nihilism he saw in society (Heidegger, 1961). Eternal recurrence serves as both a metaphysical hypothesis and an existential challenge, prompting a rethinking of time, existence, and agency. In posthumanism, transhumanism, and metahumanism, eternal recurrence finds resonances and challenges. These movements emphasize transcending human limitations and enhancing human

capacities through advanced technologies, aligning with Nietzsche's vision of overcoming human constraints. However, eternal recurrence challenges the linear progress narratives often associated with these movements, introducing a cyclical perspective that questions the finality of technological and existential advancement (Bostrom, 2009).

The Concept of Eternal Recurrence

Eternal recurrence is not merely a hypothesis about the cosmos but an existential challenge (Lampert, 1986), demanding an affirmation of life in its entirety, with all its inherent suffering and joy. Philosophically, it challenges traditional notions of linear time and causality, suggesting a cyclic nature of existence that subverts linear progress narratives and offers a radical reinterpretation of temporality and existence (Heidegger, 1961). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche introduces eternal recurrence through Zarathustra, who presents it as a thought experiment: every moment, joy, and suffering will recur endlessly, demanding a full embrace of life (Nietzsche, 1961).

This cyclical view shifts away from seeing life as a linear sequence with a clear beginning and end, suggesting instead an eternal rebirth of each moment (Heidegger, 1961). The existential implications are profound, as Nietzsche uses this concept to test one's ability to embrace life fully, with all its inherent suffering and joy. Individuals are urged to consider whether they would live the same way if condemned to repeat life eternally (Solomon, 2003). This calls for an affirmation of life— "Amor Fati," or love of fate—where one not only endures but loves the eternal recurrence of all experiences (Kaufmann, 1974).

Eternal recurrence thus raises crucial existential questions: Can we accept our lives as they are, with all imperfections and pain? Are we capable of embracing the eternal repetition of existence without despair? These questions challenge us to find meaning and value in life's recurring cycles, urging a deeper engagement with the present moment and a reevaluation of life's significance.

Critical Interpretations

Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence has sparked extensive scholarly debate and a variety of interpretations. Some scholars, such as Martin Heidegger, view it as a metaphysical assertion about the universe, suggesting that Nietzsche posited a literal cosmological recurrence where all events repeat infinitely. Others, like Walter Kaufmann, interpret it as a psychological or existential challenge intended to test one's capacity to affirm life (Kaufmann, 1974). A significant aspect of the debate revolves around the relation of eternal recurrence to determinism and free will. If all events recur infinitely, it raises questions about freedom and agency (Deleuze, 1983). Some, like Gilles Deleuze, argue that eternal recurrence implies deterministic fatalism, where free will is an illusion, while others, including Robert C. Solomon, contend that it challenges individuals to exercise their will within this infinite cycle, affirming their existence and choices (Solomon, 2003).

Integrating eternal recurrence with contemporary perspectives in posthumanism, transhumanism, and metahumanism adds further dimensions to these debates. Posthumanist thinkers, such as Rosi Braidotti and N. Katherine Hayles, critique traditional humanism and embrace technological enhancement, resonating with Nietzsche's challenge to transcend conventional human limitations (Hayles, 1999). Transhumanists like Nick Bostrom focus on using technology to overcome human constraints, aligning with Nietzsche's call for the *Übermensch*, who embraces eternal recurrence as a path to self-overcoming. Metahumanists, such as Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, seek to integrate human and

technological elements into a new synthesis, viewing eternal recurrence as a framework for exploring the cyclical nature of human and technological evolution.

Evolution of AI and Virtual Reality Technologies

Historical Development

The evolution of AI and VR technologies has been marked by significant milestones. AI's history began with Alan Turing's work on machine intelligence in the 1950s, advancing through the development of expert systems in the 1980s and the rise of deep learning in recent years (Russell & Norvig, 2016). VR technology has evolved from basic flight simulators in the 1960s to highly immersive systems today (Lanier, 2010). In parallel, VR technology has evolved from basic flight simulators and rudimentary headsets in the 1960s and 1970s to highly immersive systems today (Lanier, 2010). Milestones include the introduction of the first consumer VR headset, the Oculus Rift, in 2012 and subsequent developments in haptic feedback, motion tracking, and 3D rendering (Rheingold, 1991).

Current Capabilities and Limitations

Currently, AI simulations can replicate complex systems and behaviors with remarkable fidelity. However, limitations such as computational power, data biases, and interpretability persist. VR, while highly immersive, still faces challenges in integrating real-world sensory experiences and mitigating motion sickness. The convergence of AI and VR technologies holds the promise of creating even more sophisticated simulations, intersecting with philosophical concepts related to posthumanism, transhumanism, and metahumanism (Bostrom, 2013). These advancements challenge traditional notions of human identity and experience, suggesting new avenues for enhancing human capabilities and integrating technology with human life.

Case Studies and Practical Applications

AI Simulations in Ecological Modeling

AI's ability to simulate complex systems allows for detailed models of phenomena like weather and ecosystems. For example, weather simulations use data from satellites and historical records to forecast conditions accurately, providing crucial information for disaster preparedness and climate research (Pearce, 1995). In ecological modeling, AI simulates interactions within ecosystems, tracking variables like species populations, predator-prey relationships, and environmental changes. Such simulations help scientists understand ecological dynamics and the potential impacts of environmental policies. For instance, AI-driven models can predict how deforestation or climate change might affect biodiversity and ecosystem services (Batty, 2013).

Human Behavior Simulations

AI also excels in simulating human behavior. By analyzing data from social media and economic transactions, AI models can predict social dynamics, economic trends, and political movements. These simulations offer insights into marketing, urban planning, and more (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Detailed Case Study: Urban Planning

A detailed case study relevant to eternal recurrence is the use of AI in urban planning. AI models simulate urban development cycles, predicting how cities evolve over time based on recurring patterns in population growth, infrastructure development, and socio-economic changes (Batty, 2013). These simulations allow urban planners to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, providing insights into sustainable development. These AI-driven simulations not only illustrate the recurrence of events but also raise philosophical questions about the nature of recurrence itself. They challenge us to consider how these models reflect Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence and what it means to understand reality through the lens of cyclical patterns. Additionally, ethical considerations emerge regarding the use of these simulations in decision-making processes, particularly concerning data privacy, bias, and the potential for misuse in influencing human behavior and societal outcomes (Floridi, 2014).

Ethical and Social Implications

Equitable Access and Social Inequality

As AI simulations become more sophisticated, it is crucial to address ethical implications. Key concerns include the potential for misuse, the risk of exacerbating social inequalities, and the protection of individual autonomy and privacy (Bostrom, 2013). Ensuring equitable access to these technologies is essential to prevent deepening existing social divides. One major ethical consideration is ensuring equitable access to these advanced technologies. If AI simulations are only accessible to a privileged few, they could deepen existing social divides and create new forms of inequality (Turkle, 2011). Additionally, the data used to power these simulations must be handled responsibly, with strict safeguards to protect user privacy and prevent misuse.

Privacy and Autonomy

AI technologies that enhance cognitive or physical abilities often require access to vast amounts of personal data. Safeguarding this data and ensuring individual control over AI-enhanced capabilities is crucial (Floridi, 2014). There is also the risk of coercion, where individuals might feel pressured to adopt AI enhancements to remain competitive, challenging the concept of voluntary enhancement.

Ethical Frameworks and Responsible Development

Balancing technological innovation with philosophical reflection is essential to the responsible development of AI. While technological advancements can drive significant progress, they must be guided by thoughtful philosophical inquiry to ensure they enhance rather than diminish human well-being (Floridi, 2014). Philosophers and ethicists should work alongside technologists to address the deeper implications of AI simulations, ensuring that these tools are used to foster understanding and growth rather than manipulation or control. Responsible use of AI simulations also involves critically examining how these technologies influence human values and behaviors (Turkle, 2011). For example, simulations that repeatedly expose users to moral or existential dilemmas could shape their ethical decision-making processes, potentially in unintended ways. Continuous ethical reflection is necessary to ensure these simulations support positive outcomes, such as

increased empathy and moral reasoning, rather than negative ones, such as desensitization or ethical fatigue (Kahneman, 2011). Ultimately, the responsible development and use of AI simulations require a delicate balance between embracing technological potential and maintaining rigorous philosophical scrutiny (Floridi, 2014). This approach will help ensure that AI technologies contribute meaningfully to our understanding of existence and the enhancement of human life.

Interdisciplinary Integration

Cognitive Science Insights

Interdisciplinary insights from cognitive science help improve the algorithms' learning processes, enabling them to better recognize and replicate complex patterns (Goodfellow et al., 2016). For example, cognitive science research on human-computer interaction and the psychological effects of immersive virtual experiences can inform the design of AI simulations that replicate existential experiences. Understanding how the brain processes repetitive information and how this impacts cognition and behavior is crucial for developing effective simulations (Damasio, 1999).

Philosophical Perspectives

Philosophical perspectives, particularly from Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, challenge researchers to consider the deeper implications of these cyclic models (Nehamas, 1985). Ethical considerations also play a crucial role, as the accuracy and application of these simulations raise questions about data privacy, potential biases, and the impact on human decision-making. Technology studies contribute to the practical implementation and refinement of these models, ensuring they are robust and reliable (Deleuze, 1983).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations must be integrated into the development and application of AI simulations. This includes addressing potential biases in the data and algorithms, ensuring equitable access to the technology, and safeguarding user privacy. By considering these ethical dimensions, researchers can develop AI simulations that not only advance our understanding of philosophical concepts but also promote social good (Braidotti, 2013).

By integrating these interdisciplinary insights, AI simulations can more effectively model recurrence, offering profound implications for both theoretical inquiry and practical applications (Kahneman, 2011). These models not only advance our understanding of cyclical phenomena but also challenge us to reconsider our perceptions of time, reality, and the ethical use of technology in society.

Philosophical and Psychological Insights

Experiential Reality in Virtual Environments

User experiences in AI-driven simulations are at the forefront of exploring the phenomenology of living within a simulated recurrence. These virtual environments, powered by sophisticated AI, offer immersive experiences that can closely mimic reality, allowing users to engage with and respond to cyclic patterns and events (Turkle, 2011). The phenomenology of living within such a simulation involves examining how users perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to these recurrent scenarios.

Therapeutic Applications

One compelling example is VR simulations used in therapeutic settings for treating PTSD. These simulations recreate traumatic events in a controlled, repetitive manner, enabling users to confront and process their experiences repeatedly (Rizzo et al., 2009). The cyclic nature of these simulations allows for gradual desensitization and cognitive restructuring, illustrating how repeated exposure within a virtual environment can facilitate psychological healing (Floridi, 2014).

Educational Applications

Another example is found in educational VR applications, where AI-driven simulations create recurring scenarios for training purposes. Medical students, for instance, can repeatedly practice surgical procedures in a virtual operating room (Lanier, 2010). The ability to engage with the same scenario multiple times enhances skill acquisition and confidence, demonstrating the benefits of recurrence in a learning context (Rheingold, 1991).

Psychological Impact

These user interactions highlight the profound impact of experiencing recurrence in virtual environments. Users report heightened emotional and cognitive engagement, often finding the repetitive nature of these simulations both challenging and enriching. The immersive quality of VR, combined with the AI's ability to adapt and modify scenarios based on user interactions, creates a dynamic and responsive experiential reality (Damasio, 1999). These virtual experiences raise philosophical questions about the nature of reality, perception, and the concept of recurrence. They challenge users to reflect on the implications of cyclic existence and how it shapes their perceptions and behaviors. Moreover, ethical considerations emerge regarding the use of these simulations in decision-making processes, particularly in therapeutic and educational settings (Floridi, 2014). Ensuring data privacy, avoiding bias, and preventing potential misuse are crucial to responsibly leveraging these powerful technologies.

Theoretical and Conceptual Models

Designing AI Simulations for Recurrence

Designing AI simulations to mimic eternal recurrence involves creating models that can replicate cyclical patterns and events over extended periods (Goodfellow et al., 2016). These simulations rely on advanced algorithms and vast datasets to identify and recreate recurring phenomena. By embedding the principles of recurrence into their design, these AI models can provide valuable insights into the nature of cyclic events and their implications for various fields.

Case Studies in Recurrence Modeling

One notable case study is the use of AI in ecological modeling, where researchers simulate the cyclic interactions within ecosystems. These models track variables such as species populations, predator-prey dynamics, and seasonal changes (Pearce, 1995). By analyzing these recurring patterns, scientists can predict ecological shifts and devise strategies for conservation and sustainable management. Another example is in economic forecasting, where AI models simulate market cycles, identifying trends and predicting economic

downturns and recoveries (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). These simulations help policymakers and investors make informed decisions based on historical and predicted patterns.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Interdisciplinary connections enrich the understanding and development of these theoretical models. Insights from cognitive science help improve the algorithms' learning processes, enabling them to better recognize and replicate complex patterns (Kahneman, 2011). Philosophical perspectives, particularly from Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, challenge researchers to consider the deeper implications of these cyclic models. Ethical considerations also play a crucial role, as the accuracy and application of these simulations raise questions about data privacy, potential biases, and the impact on human decision-making (Deleuze, 1983). By integrating these interdisciplinary insights, AI simulations can more effectively model recurrence, offering profound implications for both theoretical inquiry and practical applications. These models not only advance our understanding of cyclical phenomena but also challenge us to reconsider our perceptions of time, reality, and the ethical use of technology in society.

Enhancing Human Capabilities and Evolution of Identity

AI and Transhumanism

AI simulations are pivotal in the enhancement of human capabilities, a core tenet of transhumanism (Bostrom, 2009). By leveraging AI, we can extend both physical and cognitive abilities beyond their natural limits. AI's capacity to process vast amounts of data and generate insights enables humans to make more informed decisions, learn faster, and perform tasks with greater precision. One significant example of AI enhancing physical capabilities is the development of advanced prosthetics. AI-powered prosthetic limbs can adapt to the user's movements and intentions, providing more natural and efficient control (Goodfellow et al., 2016). These prosthetics often use machine learning algorithms to interpret neural signals, allowing for precise and responsive movement. This technology not only restores lost function but also enhances the user's ability to interact with their environment. In the cognitive realm, AI technologies such as personalized learning platforms and cognitive enhancement tools have revolutionized how we acquire knowledge and skills. AI-driven educational platforms adapt to individual learning styles and paces, optimizing the learning process (Lanier, 2010). Additionally, cognitive assistants like IBM's Watson provide real-time data analysis and decision support in various fields, from healthcare to finance, enhancing human cognitive capabilities.

Detailed Case Study: Brain-Computer Interfaces

A detailed case study illustrating AI's role in transhumanism is the use of AI in brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) (Maguire et al., 2008). Companies like Neuralink are developing BCIs that allow direct communication between the brain and external devices. These interfaces use AI to decode neural activity and translate it into commands, enabling users to control computers or prosthetics with their thoughts. This technology has profound implications for enhancing human capabilities, offering new avenues for treating neurological disorders and augmenting human cognition. These advancements illustrate the transformative potential of AI in extending human capabilities, aligning with transhumanist goals of overcoming biological limitations and evolving human identity. AI's role in this

evolution raises important ethical and philosophical questions about the future of humanity and the integration of technology with our natural abilities (Hayles, 1999).

AI and Metahumanism

AI plays a crucial role in the evolution of human identity, a central theme in metahumanism. Metahumanism seeks to transcend traditional human boundaries by integrating advanced technologies into our everyday lives, fundamentally altering our self-perception and societal roles (Turkle, 2011). AI, with its ability to augment and transform human capabilities, is at the forefront of this transformation (Hayles, 1999).

Self-Perception and Cognitive Assistants

One prominent case study illustrating AI's influence on self-perception is the use of AI-driven virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa (Turkle, 2011). These technologies have become integral to daily life, affecting how individuals interact with technology and perceive their own cognitive abilities. By offloading tasks such as information retrieval and decision-making to AI, users experience a shift in their cognitive processes and self-concept, increasingly viewing these technologies as extensions of their own minds.

Social Media and Societal Roles

Another significant example is the use of AI in social media platforms, which shape societal roles and self-identity. AI algorithms curate content, personalize user experiences, and influence social interactions, thereby affecting how individuals perceive themselves and their social status (Tufekci, 2014). Studies by scholars like Sherry Turkle and Zeynep Tufekci suggest that constant interaction with AI-driven social media can alter brain function, impacting attention spans and social behaviors.

Interdisciplinary Insights

Interdisciplinary insights from cognitive science and technology studies provide a deeper understanding of these phenomena. Cognitive science explores how AI influences human cognition and identity, revealing the profound impact of technology on neural processes and psychological states. For example, the work of Antonio Damasio on emotion and consciousness highlights how AI interfaces can reshape human experiences (Damasio, 1999). Technology studies examine the broader societal implications, including ethical considerations and the potential for AI to reinforce existing social hierarchies or create new forms of inequality as discussed by scholars like Langdon Winner (1986). These interdisciplinary perspectives highlight the transformative potential of AI in redefining human identity (Hayles, 1999). Philosophically, AI challenges our understanding of what it means to be human, as it blurs the boundaries between human and machine. This prompts ongoing inquiry into the essence of humanity and the ethical implications of integrating advanced technologies into our lives (Floridi, 2014).

Ethical and Philosophical Implications

Enhancing human capabilities through AI presents significant ethical considerations that warrant careful examination. One major concern is the potential for exacerbating social inequalities. Access to advanced AI technologies is often limited to those with substantial

resources, potentially widening the gap between different socio-economic groups (Turkle, 2011). Ensuring equitable access to AI enhancements is crucial to prevent new forms of social stratification (Floridi, 2014). Privacy and autonomy are also critical ethical issues. AI technologies that enhance cognitive or physical abilities often require access to vast amounts of personal data (Bostrom, 2009). Safeguarding this data and ensuring that individuals maintain control over their AI-enhanced capabilities is essential. There is also the risk of coercion, where individuals might feel pressured to adopt AI enhancements to remain competitive in their professional or personal lives, challenging the concept of voluntary enhancement (Turkle, 2011).

Philosophically, the integration of AI into human life raises profound questions about the nature of human identity. In a posthumanist context, where the boundaries between human and machine blur, traditional notions of identity are challenged (Braidotti, 2013). The concept of the self may evolve from a static biological entity to a dynamic hybrid being, continually shaped by interactions with AI (Hayles, 1999). This shift prompts reflections on what it means to be human and how we define personhood. Moreover, the potential for AI to enhance or alter cognitive processes raises questions about authenticity and selfhood. If our thoughts and decisions are significantly influenced by AI, to what extent can they be considered our own? This philosophical inquiry into the nature of agency and self-determination is critical in understanding the implications of AI integration (Floridi, 2014).

These ethical and philosophical considerations highlight the need for a balanced approach to AI enhancement, ensuring that technological advancements contribute positively to human well-being and preserve the integrity of human identity (Bostrom, 2013).

Implications for Human Understanding of Time and Existence

Re-conceptualizing Time and Causality

AI simulations are profoundly altering our perceptions of linear and cyclical time, challenging traditional notions and prompting a re-conceptualization of time and causality (Bergson, 1911). By creating environments where events can be replayed, reversed, and looped, AI offers a new way of experiencing time that blurs the distinction between past, present, and future (Deleuze, 1983). This capability allows for a more fluid and dynamic understanding of temporal sequences, where time can be manipulated and re-experienced in novel ways.

Impact on Causality and Free Will

The impact on our understanding of causality and free will is significant (Kahneman, 2011). In a linear conception of time, causality follows a straightforward chronological path where cause precedes effect. However, AI simulations that enable cyclical or non-linear experiences of time disrupt this straightforward causality (Goodfellow et al. 2016). They introduce scenarios where effects can precede causes or where events repeat without clear causal origins. This challenges the traditional philosophical notion of causality and invites new interpretations of how events are interrelated. Moreover, these altered perceptions of time influence our understanding of free will (Kahneman, 2011). If time can be looped and decisions revisited, the concept of fixed, unchangeable choices becomes less rigid. This fluidity suggests a model of free will that is more iterative and dynamic, aligning with

contemporary cognitive science insights that view decision-making as a process influenced by both past experiences and future possibilities (Damasio, 1999).

Interdisciplinary Insights

Interdisciplinary insights from philosophy and cognitive science enrich this discussion (Bergson, 1911). Philosophers like Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze have long explored the fluid nature of time, while cognitive scientists investigate how the brain perceives and processes temporal information. These fields collectively highlight the transformative potential of AI in reshaping our fundamental concepts of time and causality, encouraging a more nuanced and flexible understanding of human existence (Chalmers, 2010).

Existential and Ethical Considerations

The ethical implications of simulating eternal recurrence are profound, raising significant questions about the nature of human existence and the values that guide our decision-making. AI simulations that replicate Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence compel us to confront the ethical dimensions of living in a world where every moment might be infinitely repeated (Nehamas, 1985). This scenario challenges traditional ethical frameworks, emphasizing the importance of each action and decision (Solomon, 2003). One ethical concern is the potential for AI simulations to alter human values and behavior (Floridi, 2014). If individuals believe their actions will recur eternally, they may adopt more thoughtful and deliberate decision-making processes, prioritizing actions that align with long-term well-being and ethical integrity (Kahneman, 2011). Conversely, the knowledge of eternal recurrence could lead to existential despair or a sense of futility, undermining motivation and ethical behavior (Nehamas, 1985).

Case Studies: Therapeutic and Educational Applications

A detailed case study illustrating these implications can be found in the use of AI-driven virtual reality (VR) therapy for trauma victims (Rizzo et al., 2009). These simulations allow patients to repeatedly confront and process traumatic events in a controlled environment, akin to experiencing eternal recurrence. While this approach has therapeutic benefits, such as desensitization and cognitive restructuring, it also raises ethical questions about the long-term psychological effects of repeated exposure to trauma and the potential for re-traumatization. Another case study involves AI in educational settings, where students use simulations to repeatedly practice complex skills, such as surgical procedures or crisis management (Lanier, 2010). This method enhances proficiency and ethical decision-making by emphasizing the importance of each action in high-stakes environments. However, it also necessitates ethical guidelines to ensure the simulations do not create unrealistic expectations or overconfidence (Floridi, 2014).

These case studies underscore the transformative potential of AI simulations while highlighting the need for ethical frameworks that address the complexities of eternal recurrence. As AI continues to evolve, its influence on human values, ethics, and decision-making will require ongoing philosophical and ethical scrutiny to ensure these technologies contribute positively to human flourishing (Bostrom, 2013).

Philosophical and Psychological Effects

The simulation of eternal recurrence through AI technologies could profoundly affect our sense of purpose and meaning (Nehamas, 1985). Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence challenges individuals to embrace life fully, treating each moment as if it will recur infinitely (Lampert, 1986). In simulated environments, this idea gains new dimensions, potentially altering how we perceive our actions and their significance (Solomon, 2003). Experiencing simulated recurrence might prompt individuals to reflect more deeply on their choices, fostering a heightened sense of responsibility and intentionality (Kahneman, 2011). If one's actions are perceived as recurring eternally, it could encourage a more thoughtful and purposeful approach to life. Conversely, the notion that every moment will repeat endlessly might induce existential despair or a sense of futility, undermining motivation and diminishing the perceived value of individual actions.

Psychologically, the impact of experiencing a simulated eternal return could be significant (Damasio, 1999). Repeated exposure to the same scenarios, especially those involving moral or existential dilemmas, might lead to cognitive and emotional changes (Kahneman, 2011). For instance, cognitive science research suggests that repetitive experiences can alter neural pathways, potentially enhancing learning and memory but also risking desensitization or psychological distress. Daniel Kahneman's research on decision-making under uncertainty offers insights into how people might adapt to the pressures of recurrent scenarios, balancing rational evaluation with emotional responses. Interdisciplinary insights from cognitive science and psychology can further illuminate these effects (Damasio, 1999). Cognitive science explores how the brain processes repetitive information, while psychology examines emotional and behavioral responses to such experiences. Together, these fields provide a comprehensive understanding of how simulated recurrence influences human cognition and emotion, highlighting the interplay between our philosophical reflections on meaning and the psychological impacts of experiencing life as an endless cycle (Nehamas, 1985).

Conclusion and Future Research

Summary of Key Points

This paper explored integrating Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence with AI-driven simulations, demonstrating how these technologies can expand our understanding of time, existence, and meaning. The intersection of AI technology with philosophical inquiry offers unique perspectives on eternal recurrence and broader implications for human identity. The evolution of AI and VR technologies shows significant milestones in simulating complex systems. AI's ability to model cyclic events and provide high-fidelity simulations reveals its potential to replicate aspects of eternal recurrence. The impact of experiencing simulated recurrence on users is analyzed, including psychological effects and philosophical reflections on reality and existence. Ethical considerations related to AI simulations, such as data privacy, bias, and equitable access, are emphasized, highlighting the need for responsible development and application (Floridi, 2014).

Furthermore, the paper explores AI's role in transhumanism and metahumanism, showing how AI technologies can extend human abilities and alter self-perception and societal roles. The philosophical and ethical implications of these enhancements are discussed, focusing on potential social inequality and redefined human identity. AI simulations challenge traditional notions of time, offering new perspectives on causality and

free will. Interdisciplinary insights from philosophy and cognitive science provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI can reshape our concepts of time and existence (Chalmers, 2010). This summary encapsulates the main arguments and findings, providing a cohesive overview of how AI simulations intersect with Nietzsche's concept, emphasizing the interdisciplinary approach, ethical considerations, and transformative potential of AI technologies in reshaping our understanding of existence (Floridi, 2014).

Final Reflections

The potential of AI simulations to offer new perspectives on Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and human enhancement is profound. Future research should explore both technological advancements and philosophical implications, ensuring that technological innovations are critically examined and aligned with human values. Future research should explore both technological advancements and philosophical implications. Cognitive scientist Daniel Kahneman's work on decision-making under uncertainty could offer valuable insights into how people adapt to recurrent scenarios in AI simulations. Ethical perspectives from scholars like Luciano Floridi can guide responsible development and application of these technologies (Floridi, 2014). Concrete case studies can further illuminate AI simulations' transformative potential. For example, AI-driven virtual reality therapy for PTSD allows trauma victims to repeatedly confront their experiences, demonstrating practical benefits and ethical complexities (Rizzo et al., 2009). Similarly, AI in educational settings, such as simulations for medical training, shows how repetitive practice enhances proficiency and ethical decision-making.

Philosophical inquiry should remain central, ensuring that technological innovations are critically examined and aligned with human values. As AI evolves, addressing ethical considerations and potential risks, such as exacerbating social inequalities or compromising autonomy, is crucial. By balancing technological advancement with philosophical reflection, we can harness AI's transformative potential to enhance human life while preserving its depth (Bostrom, 2013). Ultimately, the intersection of AI simulations and Nietzsche's eternal recurrence represents fertile ground for exploration, promising new insights into time, existence, and identity. As we navigate this terrain, it is essential to approach it with both curiosity and caution, recognizing these technologies' profound implications for our understanding of humanity.

Invitation for Further Inquiry

We invite scholars and practitioners from diverse fields to join this inquiry, fostering a collaborative effort that pushes the boundaries of philosophical thought and technological application. Together, we can explore the profound questions raised by AI simulations and Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, advancing our collective understanding of human existence in the age of AI. To realize this potential, ongoing exploration is essential. AI simulations provide a practical framework for engaging with abstract concepts and an experiential dimension that can transform our approach to philosophical questions. These technologies challenge us to reconsider assumptions about time, causality, and agency, offering new ways to conceptualize these aspects of existence (Chalmers, 2010).

Interdisciplinary dialogue is crucial. Philosophers, cognitive scientists, ethicists, and technologists must collaborate to address these inquiries (Bostrom, 2013). Insights from cognitive science and psychology can elucidate how AI simulations impact human cognition and behavior, while ethical considerations guide responsible development. Scholars like

Daniel Kahneman, Luciano Floridi, and Sherry Turkle provide valuable perspectives to ensure technological advancements align with human values (Floridi, 2014). Future research should explore the balance between technological innovation and philosophical reflection, ensuring AI advancements contribute positively to human understanding. By maintaining a critical and reflective approach, we can harness AI's transformative potential to enhance our comprehension of complex philosophical concepts and their implications for humanity's future. We invite scholars and practitioners from diverse fields to join this inquiry, fostering a collaborative effort that pushes the boundaries of philosophical thought and technological application. Together, we can explore the profound questions raised by AI simulations and Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, advancing our collective understanding of human existence in the age of AI (Nehamas, 1985).

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PART III.

Nietzsche, Euro-Transhumanism, and Critical Posthumanism

BECOMING MORE THAN WHO YOU ARE: EURO-TRANSHUMANISM, NIETZSCHE, AND EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF DIGITIZATION AND AUTOMATION

Tamara Kamatović

Abstract

This article applies a Euro-transhumanist approach to technologically enhanced learning as it relates to educational practice. It shows that Euro-transhumanism provides a starting point for thinking about the entanglements between ethical and philosophical questions about pedagogy, the environment, emerging technologies, and automation. It draws also on Nietzsche's influence on Euro-transhumanism, showing how his philosophy of education, which was built on foundations of theories of transformation, change, as well as how the profound impact of learning on human anthropology contrasts with traditional Enlightenment views about universal education or "natural law," as epitomized by Rousseau. It argues that Nietzsche's philosophy of education, which is often characterized as "backward-looking" is, on the contrary, excellently positioned to deliver answers about the future of education. The article questions the extent to which the practice and defense of technologically enhanced learning sufficiently answers the questions: what is enhanced and for what purpose? Using the category of "otium", it speculates on how emerging technologies and automation might allow us to better realize transformational educational goals.

Keywords

Euro-transhumanism, Nietzsche, technologically-enhanced learning, transformation, educational futures, otium.

Introduction

The digital revolution in learning presents us both with great opportunities for reforming education, but also with challenges that require transformative solutions. The release of OpenAI's large language model Chat GPT, which has increased awareness and public perception about the development of AI tools and their application to education, has fomented broad debate about entanglements between education and ethics, which are being considered from the perspective of both curriculum design as well as teaching and learning with new technologies. Given the rapid development of AI and technologies and the many possibilities of their application, however, current discussions only scratch at the surface of what will be a sea change in the way in which we teach and learn.

Going far beyond questions related to authenticity or deskilling, changes to education may even involve the use of broad surveillance technologies to support and enforce

unprecedented state interventions into education. An example of this has already been reported and documented in an experiment run at a primary school in Jinhua, China, where artificial intelligence has been used to power biotechnologies, e.g. digital headbands and Bluetooth wristbands measuring bio data (brainwave and heart rate), to promote biomonitoring, surveillance, and enhance learning (Wang et al., 2019). Such tools may soon be part of "smart classrooms" around the globe, and future philosophies of education must examine fundamental questions about the purpose of education in order to both justify its future direction as well as grapple with how education can be used for both enhancement or surveillance.

Education's potential to become transformative, i.e. alter and change our relationship to the world, is remarkably absent from conversations about the future of education (Ashwin, 2020). It is also absent from conversations about teaching with emerging technologies. Many educationalists today openly describe their practice as "technologically enhanced," referring to the way in which digital tools enhance the learning experience for the student, e.g., increase student engagement, customize learning, and offer versatility. Perhaps most significantly, technology-enhanced learning increases access to education, with digital learning environments also providing more options for students with disabilities and overall increased accessibility. What is missing from these debates is not a reflection on the value of tech enhancement, but a sense of "why enhance" and "to what extent" (Kirwood & Price, 2014). The extent to which "enhancement" through technology can transform learning and knowledge for students is also missing, with very little thought given to transformative pedagogical philosophies (Freire, 2000). In the other camp, those who oppose technological changes in education do not sufficiently engage with what it would really mean to teach and learn in a substantially altered environment, and even progressive educationalists have difficulty translating transformative educational practice into online or digital practice, choosing instead to focus on inequalities in technological systems to plead for in-person learning for all. But education can and should become transformative, with or without emerging technologies. This article attempts to clarify the extent to which we can seek a philosophical justification for using digital tools towards that transformation.

To better address this, I approach the issue of technology-enhanced teaching and learning through the posthuman paradigm shift, which refers both to the transformation of our lifeworld by processes of digitization and automation, as well as an orientation towards an epistemology and ethics that rejects anthropocentrism and addresses what it means to "become other" or "more than" human in an era of rapid technological change. The intersection of learning and becoming is highlighted especially by the Euro-transhumanist approach (Schussler & Balistieri, 2024), which takes Friedrich Nietzsche's non-dualist anthropology as a starting point for debates about the future of education (Sorgner, 2015). This article draws on but goes beyond these debates, which are primarily focused on analyzing parallel or analogous structures between biological enhancement and education through the lens of epigenetics. It reveals how Nietzsche's own call for a "transvaluation of values" in education reflects the current posthuman paradigm shift, which both confront what it means to "become who we are." I examine Nietzsche's views on formation of disciplines as well as his definition of the *purpose* of education, which he articulated as a reaction to the "disenchantment" brought about by forces of rationalization and alienation (Weber, 2004). I will show that by rejecting central universalist premises, Nietzsche was better positioned to deal with the question "what is an education" and "why do we educate" than traditional Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who subordinated

educational practice to political reform programs. I also show how his philosophy of education rejected central premises of the "economic rationalization" of education.

Nietzsche Contra the Enlightenment: Defending Scepters of Genius

Since the Enlightenment, the answer to "for whom is education" has been: "everyone." The development of educational institutions, programs, and curricula was thus a means to realizing better and more just social arrangements through education, or, in other words, using "education" as an instrument for social reform. Universalizing education was justified by a theory of rights based on a natural order, wherein all men are equal, as well as a constructive correlation between "humanity" and "nature". In the American pragmatist and philosopher John Dewey's brief historical survey of education's relationship to democracy, he sums up the Enlightenment's aims as a reproduction of "emancipated individuals" based on the cultivation of "humanity" by "nature"

> The extent of the transformation of educational philosophy which occurred in Germany in the generation occupied by the struggle against Napoleon for national independence, may be gathered from Kant, who well expresses the earlier individual-cosmopolitan ideal. In his treatise on Pedagogics, consisting of lectures given in the later years of the eighteenth century, he defines education as the process by which man becomes man. Mankind begins its history submerged in nature-not as Man who is a creature of reason, while nature furnishes only instinct and appetite. Nature offers simply the germs which education is to develop and perfect. The peculiarity of truly human life is that man has to create himself by his own voluntary efforts; he has to make himself a truly moral, rational, and free being. This creative effort is carried on by the educational activities of slow generations. Its acceleration depends upon men consciously striving to educate their successors not for the existing state of affairs but so as to make possible a future better humanity. But there is the great difficulty. Each generation is inclined to educate its young so as to get along in the present world instead of with a view to the proper end of education: the promotion of the best possible realization of humanity as humanity. (Dewey, 1916a, p. 95)

Dewey located the germ of this thought in Plato's *Republic*, where knowledge is a means of realizing a common good or virtue towards "the end of existence," or towards "ideal forms" (Dewey, 1916a, p. 88). For the Enlightenment, these "ideal forms" are no longer disembodied and abstract but can be found in all natural forces, objects, and in nature's logic.

Rousseau, who was deeply influenced by Plato, gives perhaps the most forceful account of the relationship between nature and humanity, using this relationship to develop a program for a universal education that would be best suited to creating better societies (Dewey, 1916a).[1] For Rousseau, nature is both infallible and the exclusive source of intelligence (Rousseau, 1918, p. 1). Nature being an equalizer, the essential task set before

[1] "Read the 'Republic of Plato'. It is not a work on politics, as those think who judge of books by their titles, but it is the finest work on education ever written" (Rousseau, 1918, p. 6).

the tutor, or the teacher is the nurturing and cultivation of men (and then citizens) through the cultivation of natural intelligence. The enemies of nature and nurturing, for Rousseau, are "habit" and "mercenary attitudes," or, alternatively phrased, custom and profit extraction through subjugation—two defining features of feudal society (Rousseau, 1918, p. 17). Rousseau's discourse on education reveals itself as less of a manifesto towards creating a new educational program and more of a class polemics that upbraids the gentry for their reliance on forms of habitus-induced violence and the domination of tradition and force.[2] To become a citizen means to learn first to become an individual that is formed and defined by nature. The goal of education is to open a child's eyes to the reason within him, not to teach him useless things, or to discipline him into conforming to a set of social norms. For Rousseau, the endowment of mental skill and aptitudes, of natural intelligence, is best employed in the cultivation of useful and original ideas, not towards memorization or rote learning (as a result, he massively undervalues memory as a cognitive skill). But this cultivation is not for the purpose of upholding the individual alone but rather based on what Rousseau believes is good for a society, as it teaches men about their duties to others. An education properly and naturally guided is a means of realizing and enabling a just society in which social bonds are naturally directed through forms of virtuous self-conduct.

The moral dimension to Rousseau's polemics was not unique to the Enlightenment, but present and dominant in the philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of education since Plato, as Dewey recognized. The shift in attitudes towards education in the eighteenth century coincided with a transformation in political regimes, which sought to shape new modes of inquiry in relation to natural law by dissolving the power of the Church and overturning the feudal state. Realizing this new society based on a principle of mass "education" was, thus, as Dewey points out, also a step towards a new form of social control and domination, or the creation of the modern administrative state. By not realizing what an education is or is "good for," Enlightenment thinkers overturned the feudal form of education, which granted education only to a privileged few, only to create better and more effective form of control: "education became a civic function and the civic function was identified with the realization of the national state […] to form the citizen not the "man", became the aim of education" (Dewey, 1916a, p. 93).

The realization of the state-run, civic project of universalized education, as it was carried out by the Prussian state, greatly disgusted Nietzsche, who was stridently anti-German and found the "reforms" of secondary schools not only lacking, but deleterious to teaching, learning, and to the disciplines to which he felt responsible. In lectures he delivered in Basel between January and March of 1872, Nietzsche anticipated not only the incursion of the state into every aspect of the development of school curricula and the overseeing of teaching and learning—a legacy enduring to this day through state support and investment in education—but he also foresaw what would become the professionalization and objectivization of science described my Max Weber in 1917 (Weber, 2004). Nietzsche endorses a notion of "classical" or "formal" education and self-cultivation (*Bildung*) over the "scientific" education, noting, in his characteristically polemical style, that there is a world of difference between those who have undergone the transformative effects of *Bildung* and those who have been trained to become "scientists" or "academics" (Nietzsche, 2017, p. 28). In principle, Nietzsche's account of "Bildung" is an account that goes towards defending the roles of disciplines within institutions against the corrupting influences of the

[2] Rousseau's polemics are also always a polemics with the Encyclopedists, in particular his friend (turned enemy) Denis Diderot.

state. Nietzsche refers to these disciplines as "scepters of genius." By this, he does not refer to the "genius" as an embodied being, a "superhuman," but rather to the "collective bodies of knowledge" (Ashwin, 2022) to which he felt responsible, in particular modern (German) and ancient literatures and languages. In another lecture delivered also in Basel, Nietzsche goes so far as to say that the practice of philology is in itself "pedagogical" and that the practice of science (*Wissenschaft*) or research grew out of the pedagogical nature of the practice of philology (Nietzsche, 1869). The extent, of course, to which we can say that Nietzsche was either an educationalist or a philologist is not important here, and some doubts have been raised about his investment in either of these endeavors, but the attention he paid to these issues shows the extent to which he imagined educational institutions as something other than an extension of the modern state (Babich, 2019).

As with Rousseau, nature plays an important role in Nietzsche's account, but where Rousseau's nature is beneficent, nurturing, and borders on the "effeminate," Nietzsche's is a source of violence, suffering, and pain. Their approach to nature and more elementary life questions cannot, indeed, be more different. Whereas Rousseau believed that 'physical soundness' was necessary for the development of spiritual powers and idealized a state of natural harmony, Nietzsche was obsessed with the transformative power of crisis and change, locating in his own recurring illnesses the possibility for intellectual breakthroughs and room for the creation of "threshold concepts". Nietzsche's characterization of man's relationship to nature and his environment is particularly relevant for our era, which stands under the shadow of crisis and the disruptive effects of what some refer to as a "climate apocalypse". These disruptive effects affect all areas of our social organization and life, laying the ground for the establishment of not only educational curricula, but the direction of entire educational institutions that aim to shape educational outcomes in response to the interdisciplinary challenges posed by the climate crisis (Barkham, 2023).

Where Rousseau's model of education is driven by the notion of "duty," or the creation of a new and more just social order, Nietzsche's notion of education was independent of and went beyond the norms of a democratic social order and morality. Dewey in particular criticized Nietzsche for undermining all norms associated with democratic and peaceable living and criticized him for leading the Germans into the First World War, finding in his philosophy the legitimation for a nation throwing off "the last vestige of need for any moral basis and aim" (Dewey, 1916b).

Yet this reading of Nietzsche completely misses the very thing of which Dewey and Nietzsche were both critical: the misappropriation of education for political reasons. Nietzsche opposed "universalism" in education because he observed in the Prussian state's agenda a militarism and self-interest that opposed the very "purpose" and nature of education. His lectures criticize mass education as a means of critiquing the professionalization carried out by the state. For Nietzsche, the "journalist" is a synecdoche for an entire cast of political professionals, i.e., specialized state administrators, whom he opposes to "education". Thus:

> the expansion and the denigration of education go hand in hand; the newspaper effectively replaces education, and even those who still have claims on education now tend to lean on that sticky layer of mediation that cements the gaps between all forms of life, all classes, all arts, all sciences, and which is as firm and reliable as a newspaper tends to be. In the newspaper, the peculiar educational intention of the present age culminates: just as the journalist, the servant of the moment, has taken the

> place of the great genius, the leader for all times, the redeemer from the moment. (Nietzsche, 2017, my translation, p.18)

Although this message from Nietzsche will inevitably strikes the modern reader as weird, or even politically dangerous, especially in its invocation of the need for "the redeemer" and the "leader for all times," we must not read Nietzsche's argument about education as an apologia of feudalism, or as a defense of entitlements, titles, and aristocratic privileges, but rather as a defense of education against the culminating forces of modernity as they presented themselves in the guise of the rationalist state. For Nietzsche, the threat to education was imminent: these forces threatened to undermine the purpose of education, which was the immersion of oneself in the study of a discipline and the practice of subjecting of oneself to that discipline, which he described as a form of both moral enhancement as well as a kind of self-discipline (*Selbstzucht*). The extent to which that can be elaborated on, expanded, or enhanced with technologies is a question we turn to next.

Substituting Consequence for Cause: Towards an Understanding of Enhancement in Education through the Virtue of *Otium*

Conversations about technologically-enhanced learning are also debates about power. Here, Euro-transhumanism, which builds on Nietzsche's idea of the will to power and discusses power in relation to education, is well positioned to expand on and deliver conceptual structure to these debates. There are two trends in discussing technology and power. On the one hand, some debate how technological objects or power imbalances can create hierarchies, e.g. how digital personal devices like smartphones breed overdependence and should be considered through the biopolitical lens. On the other hand, many critique technology in relation to questions of inequality in order to understand how new technologies further destabilize (instead of stabilize) technologically under-resourced regions. A 2023 report led by UNESCO (*Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023*, 2023), voices a fear that online and distance learning has created a two-tiered system for the rich and powerful, who have access to in-person education. Given that our systems are not designed to support universal digital learning, only some will have access to digital learning, while others will suffer from poor data coverage or insufficient bandwidth.

The response to such concerns from tech-enthusiastic educationalists, or from educationalists embracing technology enhanced learning, are not philosophically sound. This owes, in part, to the use of the term "enhancement," which is broadly used, but not specifically defined (Kirwood & Price, 2014). As the educational researchers Kirkwood and Price have uncovered, the term "enhancement" does indeed—or can- refer to processes of transformation, in particular the introduction of "radical, positive change in existing processes or introducing new processes" to teaching and learning, but in practice, technologies do not so much transform as much as they "replace" traditional educational structures, leaving the question of *how* or *what* is enhanced unanswered.

At the same time, the question of power remains a problem for introducing digital tools into education. For Nietzsche, this characterization of the relationship between power and education follows from the first of four great "errors," that which confuses "consequence" for "cause" (Nietzsche, 1999). To illustrate this error, he uses the example of the Venetian nobleman Alvise (Luigi) Cornaro, who recommended abstinence from heavy foods to extend one's lifespan (Nietzsche, 1999). Cornaro, who had written a popular book on the subject, had, according to Nietzsche sown great confusion and mischief by confusing the

real cause of his long life with his virtuous diet. It was not his diet, but rather his slow metabolism that resulted in his long life. What kept Cornaro thin and healthy into senescence was his body and not his lifestyle choice.

We can similarly extend this means of reasoning to debates about the use of technology and one's dependence or over-dependence on technology for learning, *viz.* debates about the use of technological devices as a source of degradation in the practice of education. In the case of online teaching, it is not the practice of teaching online that creates inequity, but rather the failure of our telecommunications systems to offer access to online learning platforms that is the source of learning injustice or imbalances in power. Or, alternatively, were we to conclude that everyone should have access to in-person learning, we need not discuss technologies, but rather we should focus on political solutions and responses that enshrine in-person access to education as a right (in addition to free and affordable, as guaranteed by the UNDHR). Even in cases where the problem lies in the design of a technological object, for example in the design of platforms like Zoom, or GoogleMeet, these platforms can also be changed (Garcia & Nichols, 2021), the technological object is not the source of the problem, but rather it is a question of merely changing its design. Either way, neither side makes clear why one is desirable over the other, nor is it sound to misidentify technological objects with the source of educational injustice.

Euro-transhumanists do a much better job of answering the question "why" it is desirable to introduce technological tools to enhance education, namely that there is a "freedom" that comes from allowing liberal use of technologies and that "freedom" helps us realize a great "plurality of idiosyncratic lifestyles" as described by Euro-transhumanist philosopher Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 41). For Sorgner, this applies specifically to "education," especially to the freedom of parents to make decisions regarding the education of their offspring and/or the "freedom" to genetically modify them. Where Sorgner—and James Hughes (Hughes, 2004) before him—stress the positive relationship between choice and freedom, Nietzsche's reprisal of an education based in disciplinary rigor foregrounds what Sorgner, in another text, refers to as the Roman virtue of "otium," or the cultivation of fine tastes that focuses on building resilience and strength. Otium, which Sorgner describes as the practice of disciplined reflection, is a form of cultivation of the self. For Sorgner, the automation of labor has forced the human labor market to reconfigure in such a way that it has made human labor redundant as well as created outcasts of governmental social security networks. At the same time, automation has led to the dissolution between categories that Nietzsche once upheld, namely "master/slave," "labor/otium" (Sorgner, 2022, p. 112). Although not all embrace the same kind of positivity about the future of automated work and there is ample reason to be skeptical about the "growing pains" associated with transitioning to automated economies, the implications for education here are enormous. Sorgner's distinction between "leisure" and otium shows a meaningful engagement with the question of how one makes use of one's time: where otium requires self-discipline, reflection, and thought, leisure, he clarifies, is a form of hedonist relaxation (Sorgner, 2022).

Nietzsche's approach strove to distinguish the question about why we pursue education and for what reason we educate from questions about "for whom" an education was designated. We can adopt and apply his dynamic approach without taking on board his conclusions about educational access. In a technologically changed world where automation undermines Nietzsche's own categories of master and slave or labor and self-cultivation, this is not only possible, but necessary. This definition of "otium" resonates with Nietzsche's own account and defense of "aristocratic" education. A glance at Nietzsche's

reflective and retrospective "biography" *Ecce Homo* gives us a sense for whom a real education is intended, namely someone embodying strong values and willing to take on education as a means of "overcoming" weaknesses, decadence, and even illness (and not the "aristocratic class" by inheritance or title). The titles of his chapters—"why I am so wise," "why I am so smart," "why my books are so great" humorously dramatize a phenomenon culturally anathema to the strictures of "Bildung": namely that it is possible to realize one's education while living and not at the end of one's life (or posthumously). Although Nietzsche's early writings valorize "Bildung" over "scholarly" or "academic" (*wissenschaftlich*) knowledge, in his later writings he derides "Bildung" as a form of Faustian "lifelong learning and striving" that emerged historically with the consciousness of the bourgeois class. For Nietzsche, the only real purpose of education is the practice of rigorous self-discipline that can lead to the breeding of new traits, qualities, and characteristics. He did not understand this form of self-discipline in a militaristic or German nationalist sense, but rather in terms of a form of self-driven "natural selection". This approach has many resonances with Euro-transhumanist approaches that center on the importance of giving individuals the choice to enhance and self-enhance, whether through education or by other means. Nietzsche's account also identifies the need for strong teachers and, implicitly, we can gather from Nietzsche's own writings about his teachers or "upbringers" that these should be men embodying outstanding qualities of genius (Schopenhauer or Wagner) against whom a student can define himself. Learning, thus, is always a form of generational struggle that results in new generations possessing better characteristics, more robust traits, and better (or enhanced) qualities.

Conclusion

Nietzsche's writings contain many answers to some of the most pressing and ongoing debates about the future of education and its entanglements with technologies. The purpose of this paper is neither historical nor exculpatory. Although aspects of Nietzsche's reflections on education and its relationship to the superhuman are generally characterized as nostalgic, retrograde, or even as a load of "Romantic gibberish" (Gray, 2016), I argue that his agile and interdisciplinary approach to thinking about education is *future-oriented* and can provide us with insights into how to defend disciplinary integrity and further embolden educational practitioners to experiment with educational practice, with and without technologies. Moreover, it is precisely those characteristics of Nietzsche's philosophy, i.e., his defense of an "aristocratic" education as it applies to maintaining the integrity of important disciplines, that can be interpreted and reapplied to a future in which automation will render many in the professional classes either redundant, or undermine the relationship between "mass education" and the labor market such that the future of education may need no economic rationalization for its existence.

Nietzsche is better able to account for the relationship between self-discipline, self-cultivation, and human change and development. At the same time, he defends bodies of knowledge from social or political systems that seek to put those bodies at the service of the state. In this way, Nietzsche's account gives us a better sense both of what education is and how educational practice and pedagogy can remain true and responsibly defend certain bodies of historical bodies of knowledge. Trained as a philologist, Nietzsche's main concern with education lay in the corruption of language curricula, in particular German and ancient Greek and Latin, which he criticized for being distorted to fit a nationalist German agenda under the heel of the Prussian state. The ideal educational subject for Nietzsche is not the

gentry, nor is it the *Bildungsbürger* of the nineteenth century, but the person who understands education as a form of self-discipline, as a process of biological change, and not as a transcendent ideal. Not mistaking consequence for cause, Nietzsche's account of his life in *Ecce homo* gives abundant examples of the climactic and meteorological conditions best suited for rigorous thought (it's Alpine and full of strong, bracing winds), as well as the diet that best suits the metabolization of thought (he rejects wine and the practice of smoking and favors the Piedmontese diet). These are not virtues of frugality, economization, or good living, they are lifestyle choices that allow for the proper metabolization of knowledge under the right conditions.

Education is indispensable to human notions of the "good life" and there are strong reasons to continue to value and finance education and treat it as a collective good. Since 1948, when the right to education was adopted in the framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, access to free primary education and affordable higher education is identified with flourishing, and well-organized societies and legally enshrined and legislated nationally and internationally. Data over the course of the last fifty years show that through recognizing the right to education, there has been a sharp decline in the number of persons globally without access to formal education, from around 50% in 1950 to 13% in 2020 (Ritchie et al., 2023). At the time Nietzsche was delivering his Basel lectures, that number lay at around 70% globally. Moreover, valuing education does good to a society. At a purely pragmatic level, societies like Denmark with high levels of education are better places to live than those with less educated populations. In this way, also, education and technology share common features, raising standards of living and promoting better ways of life.

We have (and increasingly will have) the means to offer a wider number of people a form of education that privileges knowledge holding, allowing for the extension of "otium" to many. With increasing automation, e.g. self-driving cars, etc., our technologically-modified and steered environment makes it possible for humans to live less of their life doing labor and more of it cultivating themselves. This is not a resurrection of *Bildung*, which valorizes an "ideal subject" over the educational subject in which "becoming" is delayed, belated, and even deferred to the next life, nor does it mean subjecting him to the rigors of externally-assessed or state-implemented learning outcomes, competency-based assessments, and other forms of false frameworks of "knowledge holding". Instead, this form of education can re-embed subjects in worlds of knowledge, in their environments, and anchor them in relationships based on cause and not consequence. Nietzsche translated this approach to education as "based in the little things— nourishment, diet, location, climate, rest, and the casuistry of self-discipline." Under the right conditions and with the right form of self-knowledge, we can not only "become who we are," but, with the right luck and the right application of technologies, we can "become more than what we are."

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EURO-TRANSHUMANISM AND THE ECOLOGICAL ÜBERMENSCH

Andrei Nutas

Abstract

This paper examines the convergence of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch, Euro-transhumanism, and environmental ethics to propose a new framework for human flourishing in the Anthropocene era. Amidst the paradox of technological advancement and ecological degradation, it reinterprets Nietzsche's Übermensch as an ecological being who transcends anthropocentric values. By integrating Euro-transhumanist thought, which emphasizes embodiment, ecological embeddedness, and social context, the paper advocates for a shift from individualistic enhancement to a holistic approach that fosters symbiotic relationships with nature. The synthesis suggests redefining human excellence in ecological terms, developing sustainable technologies, and addressing social justice concerns. Ultimately, it presents a vision where technological progress and environmental stewardship are aligned, offering a path toward sustainable and inclusive human development.

Keywords

Übermensch, Euro-transhumanism, environmental ethics, Anthropocene, human flourishing.

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century presents humanity with a paradox: as our technological prowess reaches new heights, the very planet we inhabit teeters on the brink of ecological collapse. This juxtaposition demands a reevaluation of the philosophical underpinnings that have propelled us to this juncture. This paper will explore the confluence of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch, the evolving field of Euro-transhumanism, and the critical imperatives of environmental ethics in the Anthropocene. By interweaving these distinct threads of thought, I aim to see if Nietzschean philosophy could be used to illuminate a path that reconciles humanity's drive for self-transcendence with the imperative of planetary preservation.

Nietzsche introduced the concept of the Übermensch in his seminal work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1978). The Übermensch represents Nietzsche's vision of human potential fully realized—an individual who has transcended conventional morality, embraced life's inherent struggles, and created their own values. This idealized figure embodies self-mastery, creativity, and a deep, wholehearted embrace of earthly existence. Nietzsche's Übermensch is not a biological evolution of humanity, but rather a cultural and spiritual transformation. It represents the pinnacle of human achievement, characterized by

the ability to overcome societal constraints and personal limitations. The philosopher envisioned the Übermensch as a goal for humanity, a beacon of possibility that could inspire individuals to strive for greatness and self-overcoming (Kaufmann, 1974). For almost one and a half centuries, Nietzsche's Übermensch has ignited fierce debate in philosophical circles. This controversial concept, often misconstrued and occasionally misused, has weathered interpretations ranging from a noble call for personal growth to a dangerous justification for supremacist ideologies. Yet, stripped of its contentious baggage, the core notion of human self-transcendence continues to captivate modern thinkers. Today, this idea finds new expression in the burgeoning field of transhumanism, where the boundaries of human potential are constantly being redefined and challenged.

Transhumanism with its desire to bring about the next iteration of the hominid shares some conceptual DNA with Nietzsche's Übermensch. At its core, transhumanism advocates for the use of advanced technologies to enhance human physical, intellectual, and psychological capacities (Bostrom, 2005). Transhumanists envision a future where humanity transcends its current limitations through technological intervention, potentially achieving forms of existence that surpass our current understanding of human nature. Transhumanism comes in two main flavors: 1) Classic transhumanism, and 2) Euro-transhumanism (which has emerged in recent years and that will be explored more in depth throughout this paper). Classic transhumanism, which has dominated much of the discourse, focuses primarily on individual enhancement through technologies such as genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and life extension. Proponents of this view, such as Nick Bostrom and Max More, argue that humans have both the right and the responsibility to direct their own evolution using technological means (More & Vita-More, 2013). This European-influenced approach to transhumanism places greater emphasis on the social, cultural, and ecological contexts of human enhancement. Euro-transhumanists, while still advocating for technological advancement, tend to be more critical of purely individualistic approaches to human enhancement and more attentive to the broader implications of transhumanist aspirations (Sorgner, 2022).

In light of these complex and often conflicting philosophical threads, this paper proposes that Euro-transhumanism offers a potential bridge between Nietzschean ideals of human excellence and the imperatives of environmental ethics. By synthesizing elements of Nietzsche's Übermensch concept, the technological aspirations of transhumanism, and the ecological awareness demanded by environmental ethics, Euro-transhumanism presents a framework for reimagining human flourishing in the Anthropocene.

This synthesis is made possible by several key features of euro-transhumanist thought:

1. Embodiment and embeddedness: Euro-transhumanism emphasizes the importance of understanding human existence as fundamentally embodied and embedded within ecological and social contexts. This perspective aligns with environmental ethics' recognition of human interdependence with natural systems.
2. Critique of individualism: Unlike classic transhumanism's focus on individual enhancement, Euro-transhumanism adopts a more holistic view of human development that considers the broader impacts of technological interventions on society and the environment.
3. Technological ecology: Euro-transhumanism advocates for the development of technologies that enhance human capabilities while simultaneously promoting ecological balance and sustainability. This also means that unlike some classic transhumanist advocates, we do not take a perpetual growth stance under limited resources seriously.

4. Cultural transformation: Drawing on Nietzsche's emphasis on cultural and spiritual transformation, Euro-transhumanism seeks to redefine notions of human excellence and progress in ways that are compatible with environmental stewardship.
5. Ethical expansion: By incorporating elements of environmental ethics, Euro-transhumanism expands the ethical considerations of human enhancement to include impacts on non-human life and ecosystems.

The Übermensch and Nietzsche's Philosophy

To fully appreciate the potential synthesis of Nietzschean ideals with transhumanist aspirations and environmental ethics, we must first explore the concept of the Übermensch and its place within Nietzsche's broader philosophical framework. This section will look into the origins and key aspects of the Übermensch concept, Nietzsche's critique of traditional morality, and his vision of self-transcendence and human excellence. The concept of the Übermensch, introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche in his 1978 work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, represents a radical reimagining of human potential and the ultimate goal of human existence. The term "Übermensch" literally means "over-human" or "beyond-human" in German. This linguistic choice is significant, as it immediately positions the concept as something that transcends current human limitations and capabilities. Nietzsche introduces the Übermensch through the prophet Zarathustra, who proclaims:

> I teach you the overhuman. [The human] is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome it? All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome [the human]? (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 3)

This proclamation sets the stage for understanding the Übermensch as a goal or ideal towards which humanity should strive, rather than a fixed state or predetermined outcome. This interpretation aligns with that of prominent Nietzsche scholars, like Walter Kaufmann (1974), Maudemarie Clark (1990), Rüdiger Safranski (2002) who would emphasize the transformative nature of the Übermensch concept. They would defend the overhuman not as a fact but as a vision, a goal. The overhuman is not to be found but to be created. With the path that leads towards this ideal being one of constant self-overcoming, a perpetual striving to transcend one's current limitations and actualize latent potentials. This aspect of the concept aligns closely with the transhumanist vision of continual self-enhancement and evolution.

It is crucial to note that Nietzsche did not envision the Übermensch as a biological evolution of humanity, but rather as a cultural and spiritual transformation. The concept is inextricably linked to Nietzsche's broader critique of traditional morality, particularly Judeo-Christian ethics and what he termed "slave morality". This critique forms the foundation upon which Nietzsche built his vision of a new, life-affirming ethic embodied by the Übermensch. Nietzsche's rejection of conventional morality stems from his belief that these systems of values are fundamentally life-denying and serve to stifle human potential. He argues that traditional moral frameworks, especially those rooted in religious doctrine, promote a mentality of ressentiment—a psychological state characterized by feelings of hostility and resentment towards those perceived as stronger or more fortunate. This slave

morality, as Nietzsche calls it, valorizes weakness, suffering, and self-denial while demonizing strength, self-assertion, and the pursuit of excellence. In contrast, the Übermensch represents the antithesis of slave morality. This idealized figure embodies what Nietzsche terms "master morality"—a value system that springs from a position of strength, self-confidence, and life-affirmation. The Übermensch does not seek to negate or escape from the realities of earthly existence but instead embraces them fully, finding joy and meaning in the struggle for self-overcoming.

Nietzsche's critique is perhaps most succinctly expressed in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> The noble type of [human] experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, 'what is harmful to me is harmful in itself'; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating. (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 204)

This passage encapsulates Nietzsche's vision of a new morality, one that is self-determined and life-affirming, in contrast to the received morality that he saw as stifling human potential. It is important to note that Nietzsche's critique of morality is not a call for amorality or mere hedonism. Rather, it is an attempt to clear the ground for a more authentic, life-affirming ethical framework. In Brian Leiter's (2002) view, Nietzsche is not an immoralist, but rather an ethical naturalist, who thinks our existing morality must be "revalued" in light of the facts about human nature and the conditions for human flourishing.

The idea of self-creation can be seen as taking central stage when it comes down to understanding the concept of Übermensch. Nietzsche envisions this figure as one who has the courage and creativity to forge their own values, unbounded by the constraints of societal norms or religious dogma. This process of value creation is not arbitrary or self-indulgent but rather a deeply meaningful act of self-realization and responsibility. The Übermensch takes upon themselves the weight of giving meaning to their existence in a world devoid of inherent purpose or divine guidance. The concept of self-transcendence, a cornerstone of Nietzsche's philosophy, strikes a powerful chord with transhumanist aspirations while also presenting fundamental challenges to some of its core assumptions. This tension provides a fertile ground for exploring the potential synthesis of Nietzschean thought, transhumanist ambitions, and environmental ethics in the context of Euro-transhumanism.

The euro-transhumanist perspective, with its emphasis on embodiment and ecological embeddedness, provides a framework for reconciling Nietzschean self-transcendence with the imperatives of environmental ethics. By recognizing the intricate web of relationships between human beings and their environment, Euro-transhumanism eschews the notion of human enhancement as a purely individualistic pursuit. Instead, it posits a more holistic vision of human flourishing that acknowledges our fundamental interconnectedness with the natural world. This ecological awareness aligns with Nietzsche's insistence on life-affirmation and his critique of otherworldly ideals. The philosopher's exhortation to remain "faithful to the earth" takes on new significance in the Anthropocene, where human activity has become a dominant force shaping planetary systems. In light on various discussion about humanity surviving by escaping to Mars or who knows what other outerspace destination this quote from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is transformed: "I beseech you, my [siblings], remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of

extraterrestrial hopes! They are mixers of poisons whether they know it or not." (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 3)

Euro-transhumanism, by integrating environmental ethics into its vision of human enhancement, offers a path for reimagining the Übermensch not as a being divorced from nature, but as one who has achieved a higher synthesis with the natural world. Moreover, Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, when understood as a drive towards self-mastery rather than domination over others, resonates with the euro-transhumanist critique of purely individualistic approaches to human enhancement. The will to power, in this context, becomes not just a personal quest for excellence, but a collective striving for a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the biosphere. The euro-transhumanist approach also addresses one of the key difficulties in applying Nietzschean thought to contemporary issues: the potential for misinterpretation and misuse. By emphasizing the social and ecological dimensions of human enhancement, Euro-transhumanism mitigates the risk of the Übermensch concept being co-opted to justify environmentally destructive practices or exacerbate social inequalities.

In this light, we can envision a new iteration of the Übermensch—one who embodies not only personal excellence and self-overcoming but also a heightened ecological consciousness. This figure would strive for technological and cultural innovations that enhance human capabilities while simultaneously fostering planetary health. The creation of new values, so central to Nietzsche's vision, takes on added significance in the face of global environmental challenges, demanding a radical rethinking of human-nature relationships.

Reconciling the Übermensch with Environmental Ethics

The reconciliation of Nietzsche's Übermensch concept with environmental ethics presents a formidable philosophical challenge that strikes at the heart of how we conceive human excellence, progress, and our relationship with the natural world. This reconciliation is not merely an academic exercise; it is crucial for developing a philosophy that can guide humanity through the unprecedented challenges of the Anthropocene era. By synthesizing Nietzschean thought, euro-transhumanist perspectives, and environmental ethics, we can articulate a vision of human flourishing that is both aspirational and ecologically grounded. As we have seen, Nietzsche's Übermensch represents a vision of human potential fully realized—an individual who has transcended conventional morality, embraced life's inherent struggles, and created their own values. This concept has often been interpreted as fundamentally anthropocentric, emphasizing human greatness at the expense of other forms of life. However, a closer examination of Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly his emphasis on "remaining true to the earth" and his critique of otherworldly ideals, suggests potential avenues for ecological reinterpretation.

The euro-transhumanist movement, with its emphasis on embodied cognition and ecological embeddedness, provides a valuable framework for this reinterpretation. As Stefan Lorenz Sorgner argues, Euro-transhumanism seeks to overcome dualistic divides. In my view this must also include overcoming the nature-culture divide, and would thus presuppose recognizing that human flourishing is inextricably linked to the flourishing of the ecosystems we inhabit. This perspective aligns with recent developments in environmental philosophy, particularly the concept of "ecological self" proposed by deep ecologists like Arne Naess (1973). The "ecological self," expands the traditional notion of selfhood to include the intricate web of relationships between humans and the natural world. Naess posits that by recognizing our interconnections with all forms of life, we

cultivate an expanded identity that transcends the isolated ego. This identification with nature fosters a sense of empathy and responsibility toward the environment, as harming it would essentially be harming an extension of oneself. This synthesis advocates for a form of human flourishing that is inherently ecological, where the pursuit of individual greatness is aligned with the health and vitality of the ecosystems we inhabit. To properly engage with this reconciliation, we must grapple with three key areas: reinterpreting human excellence in an ecological context, shifting from anthropocentric to ecocentric values, and cultivating symbiotic relationships with nature. Each of these areas presents unique obstacles and opportunities for synthesizing Nietzschean thought with environmental ethics.

Reinterpreting Human Excellence in an Ecological Context

The reinterpretation of human excellence in an ecological context requires a fundamental shift in our understanding of what constitutes greatness or superiority. Nietzsche's Übermensch is often associated with notions of power, self-mastery, and the creation of new values. However, in an age of ecological crisis, we must ask: What does true power and mastery look like in relation to the natural world?

Thus, we are forced to deal with the first challenge in integrating Nietzschean philosophy with environmental ethics, namely, reconciling Nietzsche's emphasis on individual self-creation with the more collective and globally-oriented outlook of ecological thought. Nietzsche's vision of the Übermensch as a self-determining creator of values might seem, at first glance, to be at odds with the interconnected and interdependent worldview espoused by many environmental ethicists. But, upon further examination potential points of convergence can be revealed. Nietzsche's critique of traditional morality and his call for a revaluation of all values can be seen as a precursor to the radical rethinking of human-nature relationships demanded by the Anthropocene. The philosopher's insistence on "remaining faithful to the earth" takes on new significance in an era where human activity has become a dominant force shaping planetary systems. In this context, the Nietzschean ideal of self-overcoming can be reinterpreted as not merely a personal quest for excellence, but as a collective imperative to transcend outdated modes of thinking about our place in the natural world.

As already hinted at, the ecological self, as developed by deep ecologists, offers a compelling framework for reimagining Nietzsche's Übermensch in environmental terms. This perspective demands that we expand our understanding of individuality beyond the confines of our physical bodies and immediate personal concerns. Instead, it posits a self that is fundamentally interwoven with the broader tapestry of life on Earth. In this view, the boundaries between self and environment become permeable, leading to a major shift in how we perceive our place in the world. This expanded sense of self doesn't negate individuality, but rather enriches it by acknowledging the myriad ways in which we are shaped by and connected to our environment. The ecological self recognizes that our well-being is inextricably linked to the health of the ecosystems we inhabit.

In this light, the Nietzschean Übermensch can be reimagined as one who has achieved a higher synthesis with the natural world. This ecological Übermensch would embody what ecologist Aldo Leopold (1949) termed "thinking like a mountain"—developing a perspective that encompasses the long-term, systemic impacts of our actions on ecological communities. Such an individual would possess an extraordinary capacity for ecological perception and understanding, able to "read" complex ecosystems and act in ways that enhance rather than degrade them. The emphasis on self-overcoming, so central to

Nietzsche's philosophy, takes on new significance in this ecological context. Rather than overcoming merely personal limitations, the ecological Übermensch would strive to overcome the destructive patterns of human-nature relationships that have characterized much of modern civilization. This involves transcending not just conventional morality, but also conventional modes of perception and interaction with the natural world.

Euro-transhumanism offers a unique lens through which we can further develop the concept of ecological excellence. Unlike classic transhumanist thought, which often focuses solely on individual enhancement, Euro-transhumanism encourages us to consider the broader context of our technological and cultural evolution. This approach invites us to reimagine human enhancement as a process that occurs in tandem with, rather than at the expense of, our natural environment. In this framework, the development of new technologies and capacities would be evaluated not just for their potential to augment individual human abilities, but also for their impact on ecological systems. This could lead to innovative approaches to human enhancement that actively contribute to environmental restoration and ecosystem health. For instance, we might envision bio-augmentations that allow humans and other life-forms to process environmental toxins, or cognitive enhancements that facilitate a greater understanding of complex ecological relationships. Moreover, Euro-transhumanism's emphasis on embodiment asks us to consider how our physical forms mediate our relationship with the environment. This perspective suggests that true ecological excellence might involve not just mental or spiritual transformation, but also physical adaptations that allow for more harmonious interactions with our surroundings. Such adaptations could range from heightened sensory awareness of environmental conditions to biological modifications that reduce our ecological footprint.

By integrating euro-transhumanist ideas with ecological thinking, we open up new possibilities for what it means to be an ecologically excellent human. This synthesis suggests that the path to becoming an ecological Übermensch involves not just ethical or philosophical shifts, but also tangible, embodied changes in how we exist within and interact with the natural world. In this way, Euro-transhumanism provides a bridge between Nietzsche's vision of human self-overcoming and the imperative of ecological responsibility, offering a framework for human excellence that is inherently tied to the flourishing of the entire biosphere.

Shifting from Anthropocentric to Ecocentric Values

The reconciliation of the Übermensch with environmental ethics necessitates a drastic shift from anthropocentric to ecocentric values. This shift aligns with Nietzsche's call for a "transvaluation of all values," but extends it beyond human concerns to encompass the entire ecological community. Nietzsche's critique of traditional morality provides a starting point for this shift. Just as he challenged the foundations of Christian morality, we must now challenge the anthropocentric assumptions that underlie much of modern ethics. The ecological Übermensch would be one who has overcome not just human-centered morality, but the very notion of human exceptionalism that sets us apart from and above nature. In an ecological context, we might ask: What have we done to overcome our anthropocentric biases? How can we create values that recognize the intrinsic worth of non-human nature?

This shift towards ecocentric values requires a fundamental reevaluation of worth and agency in the natural world. It requires us to recognize the intrinsic value of non-human nature, not merely for its utility to humans, but for its own sake. In this new paradigm, ecosystems, species, and even individual organisms are seen as worthy of moral

consideration in their own right. By utilizing the reinterpretation of what constitutes power and excellence given that challenges posed by the Anthropocene and within an ecological context which I have developed above, the ecological Übermensch, rather than viewing agency as something that belongs solely to humans, will recognizes that natural entities and systems have their own intrinsic right to exist and flourish. The ecological Übermensch would be one who is able to perceive and respect this distributed agency, working with rather than against the self-directed processes of natural systems. This ecocentric reorientation demands an expansion of our circle of ethical consideration far beyond its traditional boundaries. It asks us to consider the welfare of entire ecosystems in our decision-making processes, to factor in the long-term health of the planet in our actions, and to see ourselves as part of, rather than separate from, the web of life.

For the Übermensch, this shift represents a new frontier of self-overcoming. It requires transcending deeply ingrained cultural narratives about human supremacy and developing new capacities for ecological perception and empathy. The creation of ecocentric values demands not just intellectual understanding, but an experiential connection with the natural world. This shift also aligns with Nietzsche's emphasis on life-affirmation. By recognizing the value and agency of all life, we open ourselves to a more expansive and joyful engagement with existence. The ecological Übermensch would find exhilaration not in conquering nature, but in dancing with its complexity, in attuning themselves to its rhythms and flows. In embracing ecocentric values, the ecological Übermensch does not abandon human concerns, but rather situates them within a larger context of planetary well-being. This expanded perspective offers the potential for a more robust and resilient form of human flourishing that recognizes our interdependence with the health of the ecosystems we inhabit.

Cultivating Symbiotic Relationships with Nature

The final aspect of reconciling the Übermensch with environmental ethics involves cultivating symbiotic relationships with nature. This also presupposes a significant departure from traditional interpretations of Nietzschean thought, which often emphasize the individual's struggle against natural constraints. Yet, it aligns with Nietzsche's focus on embracing the fullness of life and actualizing one's true self.

Symbiosis offers a compelling metaphor for reimagining human interactions with the natural world. Biologically, symbiosis refers to close, long-term associations between different species that often result in mutual benefits, enhancing each other's survival and flourishing. Extending this concept, we can envision human-nature relationships that are not merely sustainable but regenerative. In this light, the ecological Übermensch becomes one who masters the art of symbiotic engagement with nature. This mastery entails more than just understanding ecological systems; it requires active participation that enhances their health and resilience. Such an approach demands a level of ecological literacy and sensitivity that far exceeds what is typical in contemporary society.

Furthermore, cultivating symbiotic relationships with nature necessitates a reevaluation of our traditional views on technology. This is enabled by Euro-transhumanism. As Nutas (2024) argues technology emerges from what is preexistent in the natural world and through natural means. Thus, technology cannot be viewed as a means to separate ourselves from or dominate nature because 1) technology in itself is natural, 2) without the precondition of a healthy nature technology could not exist as the conditions necessary for its being would not be sustained. Thus, Euro-transhumanism not only defends the self-evident symbiosis

between human, technology and nature but can be seen as demanding the development of technologies that deepen our embodied engagement with the world. This symbiotic perspective forces us to redefine progress and development. Rather than measuring progress by our ability to extract resources or control natural processes, we might assess it by the health and resilience of the ecological systems we inhabit.

Practical Implications and Challenges

The synthesis of Nietzschean philosophy, euro-transhumanist thought, and environmental ethics yields profound practical implications while simultaneously presenting formidable challenges. As we continue to navigate the complexities of the Anthropocene, this integrated perspective offers novel approaches to reimagining human flourishing, developing sustainable technologies, and addressing social justice concerns. However, it also raises significant ethical and practical questions that demand careful consideration.

Reimagining Human Flourishing in the Anthropocene

The euro-transhumanist reinterpretation of the Übermensch in an ecological context that I proposed provides a compelling framework for a fundamental reevaluation of what constitutes human flourishing. As one can see by looking at the current state of the world, the good life in the Anthropocene cannot be the same as the good life in the Holocene. Our new epoch demands a more nuanced and ecologically grounded understanding of human thriving.

The ecological Übermensch, as conceived through our synthesis, embodies a form of excellence measured not by conquest of nature, but by the depth and quality of one's ecological relationships. This suggests a vision of human flourishing that is fundamentally relational and embedded within broader ecological systems. Ecologist David Abram eloquently captures this sentiment, asserting, "We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human" (Abram, 1997, p. 22). This perspective reconceptualize success, well-being, and progress in ecological terms. In practical terms, this reimagining of human flourishing in the Anthropocene might manifest as a shift from measuring success purely in terms of wealth accumulation or individual achievement to considering indicators of ecological health and the quality of one's contributions to ecosystem flourishing. This aligns with economist Kate Raworth's (2017) concept of "doughnut economics". Raworth envisions a socio-economic framework that meets human needs within planetary boundaries, ensuring that we do not overuse or damage the earth's resources. The ecological Übermensch, drawing from Nietzsche's vision of transcending human limitations, can be seen as an individual or collective striving toward a more integrated, responsible, and ecologically conscious form of human existence. Both concepts challenge the traditional growth-centric mindset and anthropocentric values, urging humanity to shift toward a model of living that embraces ecological limits and fosters harmony with the environment. The ecological Übermensch, in alignment with the values of doughnut economics, embodies the self-overcoming necessary to not just survive but thrive within these limits. This Übermensch is not solely concerned with individual greatness but also with collective ecological flourishing. By redefining human excellence in terms of ecological balance, both frameworks push for a future where technological advancement, economic systems, and individual aspirations align with the well-being of the planet. The synthesis of these ideas fosters a vision of human progress that transcends the destructive patterns of the past and embraces a symbiotic relationship with the earth,

shaping an economy and culture rooted in sustainability, responsibility, and ecological harmony.

Our understanding of psychological well-being would also shift from a predominantly individualistic and internal perspective to one that acknowledges the interdependence between human mental health and the health of the ecosystems we inhabit. This expanded understanding resonates strongly with the emerging field of ecopsychology, which, as Theodore Roszak (1992) argues, seeks to address and heal the profound alienation that has grown between the individual and the natural world. Ecopsychology posits that the mental and emotional ailments so prevalent in modern society—depression, anxiety, and a pervasive sense of disconnection—are, in part, symptoms of a deeper dislocation from our ecological roots. By reconnecting with nature, ecopsychologists argue, individuals can experience an enriched sense of belonging, purpose, and psychological harmony. In the context of the ecological Übermensch, this healing of the human-nature relationship becomes central to the process of self-overcoming and achieving a higher form of human flourishing. Just as Nietzsche envisioned the Übermensch transcending conventional morality and societal norms, the ecological Übermensch would transcend the artificial boundaries that have historically separated humanity from the natural world. In this new paradigm, psychological well-being is no longer seen as a solitary pursuit but as an ongoing, dynamic interaction with the living systems that surround us. The ecological Übermensch embodies a state of psychological and spiritual integration with the earth, achieving a level of self-mastery that is inseparable from environmental stewardship. This holistic approach to well-being counters the dominant narrative of industrialized societies, where mental health is often viewed in isolation from environmental and social contexts. By integrating the insights of ecopsychology with the values of doughnut economics, we can begin to see the broader implications for societal and planetary health. The ecological Übermensch, unlike the individualistic figures celebrated in contemporary capitalist cultures, recognizes that personal fulfillment cannot be achieved at the expense of the environment. Instead, well-being is redefined as a state of mutual flourishing, where human life and ecological life are deeply intertwined.

The practical implications of this shift are imense. Urban planning, healthcare, education, and public policy would need to incorporate ecological principles into their designs and operations. Green spaces, community gardens, and eco-friendly architecture could be seen not just as aesthetic improvements or sustainability measures but as vital components of psychological health infrastructure. In education, children could be taught not only academic subjects but also ecological literacy and mindfulness practices that foster a meanigfull connection with nature from an early age. In healthcare, treatments for mental illness could include nature-based therapies, promoting outdoor activities as part of a holistic approach to psychological well-being. Furthermore, this reconceptualization of well-being aligns with what indigenous cultures have long understood: that human life is inseparable from the health of the land, water, and air. Indigenous cosmologies, often based on principles of interconnectedness and reciprocity with nature, offer valuable lessons for how we might integrate this expanded notion of psychological health into modern life. The ecological Übermensch, in this context, represents a return to ancient wisdom through the lens of modern ethics and technology. By embracing these lessons, humanity can begin to chart a course toward a more sustainable and psychologically harmonious future.

In this expanded framework, the Übermensch's drive for self-overcoming is no longer about conquering nature or achieving dominance over the external world, but rather about achieving mastery over our destructive tendencies and finding our rightful place within the

larger ecological order. This new vision of self-overcoming entails a profound humility—an acknowledgment of the limits of human power and the necessity of living in balance with the earth's natural systems. Such a shift is not merely an ethical imperative; it is a psychological and existential necessity for the survival and flourishing of both humanity and the planet. By weaving together, the insights of ecopsychology, doughnut economics, and the concept of the ecological Übermensch, we are invited to rethink the very foundations of human well-being, success, and progress. In this reimagined future, psychological health is no longer an isolated, individual pursuit but a collective endeavor rooted in the health of the planet. The ecological Übermensch leads the way, not as a solitary hero, but as a guide toward a more integrated, balanced, and life-affirming existence. The well-being of the individual and the well-being of the planet are seen as two sides of the same coin, and it is only by caring for both that true self-overcoming can be realized.

Developing Technologies Compatible with Environmental Sustainability

The development of technologies compatible with environmental sustainability is crucial in reconciling transhumanist aspirations with ecological imperatives. The euro-transhumanist perspective, with its emphasis on embodiment and ecological embeddedness, offers valuable insights for guiding technological development in more sustainable directions. Don Ihde (1990) argues that technologies are not neutral tools, but rather shape our relationship with the world in significant ways. From this perspective, the challenge is to develop technologies that enhance rather than diminish our ecological relationships.

The ecological Übermensch, as envisioned within the framework of Euro-transhumanism, seeks technological advancement that works in harmony with nature rather than exploiting it. In contrast to traditional models of progress that prioritize growth at all costs, the euro-transhumanist approach emphasizes technologies that align with planetary boundaries and foster ecological balance. Central to this vision is the idea that technological enhancement must serve not only human development but also the sustainability of the ecosystems upon which humanity depends. A key tenet of Euro-transhumanism is the rejection of the anthropocentric view that positions human innovation as separate from or superior to natural systems. Technologies developed in this context must reflect an understanding of human embeddedness within the environment. Renewable energy systems such as solar and wind power, for example, are vital to decarbonizing energy infrastructures and reducing humanity's impact on climate change. These technologies align with the ecological goals of the doughnut economics model, which seeks to meet human needs without overshooting ecological limits. By prioritizing energy solutions that work within the Earth's natural cycles, the ecological Übermensch helps to ensure long-term planetary health.

Another crucial area where euro-transhumanist thought can shape sustainable technology is in the field of biomimicry. This design philosophy, which learns from and mimics natural systems, aligns closely with the euro-transhumanist emphasis on embodiment and ecological integration. Biomimetic innovations, such as the development of buildings inspired by termite mounds that regulate temperature through passive systems, reduce energy consumption and operate in tandem with natural processes. By modeling technology after nature, biomimicry provides pathways for human enhancement that respect ecological limits. Technological ecologies, or systems where human-made technologies enhance rather than harm natural ecosystems, are another vital component of this sustainable approach. For example, agroecology integrates ecological principles into

farming systems, promoting biodiversity, improving soil health, and reducing the need for synthetic inputs. These practices mirror the euro-transhumanist vision of symbiosis between human development and the natural world. In this framework, technological advancements are designed not to dominate nature, but to support ecological resilience and human flourishing simultaneously.

One of the most compelling aspects of Euro-transhumanism is its critique of individualism in technological development. Classic transhumanism often emphasizes individual enhancement, such as life extension or cognitive augmentation, but Euro-transhumanism allows for a broader view that includes the collective and environmental impacts of such advancements. Technologies that boost human capacities must also be evaluated for their ability to enhance ecological systems. For instance, the development of biodegradable materials derived from organic substances reflects priorities—which Euro-transhumanism would back—of minimizing waste and promoting circular economies, where resources are reused, and ecosystems are preserved. Moreover, the euro-transhumanist framework incorporates ethical considerations that challenge the unchecked pursuit of technological growth. Technologies must be evaluated for their long-term ecological and social impacts. This approach advocates for a more precautionary approach as compared to Classic transhumanism. For example, while synthetic biology and genetic modification offer potential solutions to food security issues, their use must be measured against the possible disruption they could cause to natural environments. Thus Euro-transhumanism would still encourage the development of such technology but would be cautious when it comes to how this should be scaled operationally. In practical terms, this vision of technology aligned with environmental sustainability implies significant shifts in innovation, policy, and education. Urban design, energy infrastructure, and industrial processes would need to incorporate ecological principles, prioritizing sustainability at every stage. This transition also calls for an emphasis on ecological literacy, ensuring that both innovators and consumers understand the broader environmental context of their actions.

In summary, Euro-transhumanism presents a blueprint for developing technologies that are not only compatible with human enhancement but also with environmental sustainability and environmental enhancement. By focusing on technologies that promote ecological balance, minimize harm, and align with natural systems, the ecological Übermensch exemplifies a model of progress that redefines human flourishing in symbiotic harmony with the planet.

Addressing Social Justice Concerns in Euro-transhumanist Thought

The reconciliation of Nietzschean and euro-transhumanist ideas with environmental ethics inevitably raises important social justice concerns. The concept of the Übermensch, even in its ecological reinterpretation, could potentially be used to justify new forms of elitism or exclusion. Similarly, enhancement technologies, if not carefully managed, could exacerbate existing social inequalities. As we cannot have any discussion of the Anthropocene without considering issues of colonialism and indigenous rights, similarly, our ecological reinterpretation of the Übermensch and transhumanist enhancement must grapple with issues of access, power, and cultural diversity.

Addressing these concerns requires a multifaceted approach. First, we must strive for the democratization of enhancement, ensuring that enhancement technologies and ecological knowledge are accessible to all, not just a privileged few. This aligns with the work of James Hughes (2004), who argues for the importance of equal access to

enhancement technologies. This can be enabled by a progressive taxation on enhancement. Currently, many enhancement interventions that exist are prohibitively expensive. For example, CRISPER based rejuvenation therapy costs about $20.000. A progressive taxation of this therapy could mean that some people would get it for free who could not afford it while others who are multi-millionaires would have to pay a significant multiple of the actual cost to enable equal distribution of this enhancement therapy. Second, Euro-transhumanism must prioritize cultural inclusivity, recognizing that diverse communities may have different relationships with technology and nature. This approach contrasts with the often technocratic and Western-centric focus of classic transhumanism, which may overlook the values and worldviews of marginalized or indigenous groups. The ecological Übermensch, in this context, must embody a pluralistic ethic—one that honors the diversity of human experiences and ways of knowing, particularly those rooted in long-standing ecological stewardship. This could involve integrating indigenous ecological practices and knowledge systems into modern technological frameworks, ensuring that enhancement technologies are not just imposed but are co-developed in collaboration with communities. Furthermore, the redistribution of access to both enhancement technologies and ecological resources must be at the forefront of euro-transhumanist thought. Without equitable distribution, enhancement technologies risk reinforcing the very structures that our ecological Übermensch seeks to transcend through the critique of traditional power structures. Thus, policies aimed at regulating and distributing these technologies must be designed to avoid creating new forms of social stratification, ensuring that all individuals can participate in the benefits of technological and ecological advancements regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

In synthesizing the concepts of Nietzsche's Übermensch, Euro-transhumanism, and environmental ethics, this paper presents a vision for human flourishing that transcends traditional individualism and embraces ecological interdependence. The ecological Übermensch, as reconceived within this framework, embodies a form of self-overcoming that is not about dominance over nature but about achieving a harmonious relationship with it. By aligning human enhancement with ecological sustainability and social justice, Euro-transhumanism offers a path forward for navigating the profound challenges of the Anthropocene.

This vision calls for the development of technologies that are compatible with ecological health, the integration of cultural diversity into our understanding of enhancement, and the democratization of access to these advancements. By embedding human progress within planetary boundaries and emphasizing collective well-being, the ecological Übermensch requires that humanity redefine success, not as unbridled growth, but as a balance between human potential and the flourishing of the ecosystems we inhabit. In this future, technological and cultural innovations are inextricably tied to the preservation of the planet, ensuring that human progress is sustainable, inclusive, and life-affirming.

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NIETZSCHEAN HYPERAGENTS

David Roden

Abstract

Using Stefan Sorgner's Nietzschean transhumanism and Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche as a foundation, I initially develop the idea of a posthumanist ethics informed by an immanent process ontology. This account can be further radicalised in a number of ways. I essay an inhumanist reading of the temporality of technical ontogenesis via a critique of the account of time that Deleuze develops in Nietzsche and Philosophy and Difference and Repetition. Secondly, I introduce the idea of an Unbounded Speculative Posthumanism that rejects transcendental constraints on subjectivity and agency. Within Unbounded Posthumanism the idea of the Will to Power is replaced by a subtractive Xenophilia, a drive for pure difference. Posthuman ethics is replaced by a perverse counter-ethics and boundless experimentations using schematic bodily variants or "Biomorphs". Finally, I support Unbounded Posthumanism by considering a radicalised form of technological self-overcoming at which every aspect of an agent's substrate is rendered amenable to technical alteration. This marks a transition from "merely plastic" agents, like us, to hyperplastic agents (Hyperagents) for which no form or functions need be stable over time. Finally, I evaluate this argument by considering objections to it. Is the idea of the Hyperagent anything more than a conceptually incoherent thought experiment? I argue that the strongest objection to Hyperagency is based on considerations of computational complexity and consider a qualified and limited counter-objection to the claim that hyperagency is computationally intractable.

Keywords

Hyperagency, speculative posthumanism, critical posthumanism, Nietzsche, Deleuze, posthuman.

Introduction

Stefan Sorgner's 2009 article "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism" introduced a belated and much-needed speculative dimension into philosophical debates surrounding transhumanism and posthumanism. It deployed a Nietzschean power ontology to interrogate the role of the Subject in mainstream, rationalist transhumanism as well as its methodology. His article, and the response issue of the *Journal for Evolution and Technology* which followed was the occasion for my own, initially somewhat confused, attempt to formulate a speculative philosophy which took seriously the prospect of a discontinuity or "disconnection" between current humans and hypothetical "wide descendants" of humans who have ceased to be human due to some technological alteration: in other words, "posthumans" (Roden, 2010).

Here, I want to return to this scene of my original perplexity, using it once again as a springboard to articulate my doubts regarding the cogency of a substantive theory of

posthuman subjectivity or posthuman ethics. I will first consider how a critique of rationalist transhumanism can be derived from a Nietzschean naturalism, yielding a recognizable posthuman*ist* ontology of becoming and an ethics of self-overcoming that is fully exemplified in Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche. I will then consider the implications of a radicalized form of self-overcoming (Hyperagency) for this Nietzschean standpoint.[1]

Nietzsche and Transhumanism

Rationalist transhumanists, like Nick Bostrom, sometimes employ the term "posthuman" to refer to descendants of current humans whose capacities exceed human capacities due to enhancement by NBIC (Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology, and Cognitive Science) technologies. Enhancing capacities does not entail enhancement of welfare. But it is also claimed that such beings could lead hugely better lives than baseline humans (Bostrom, 2009; Roden, 2014, pp. 13-18).

Rationalist Transhumanism boils down to the claim that *if NBIC's can improve welfare by enhancing capacities, we should seek such enhancements* (all other things being equal.) However, Sorgner suggests that there are no transcendent criteria for being posthuman and no general principles validating a human to posthuman transition (Sorgner, 2009, p. 40). He does not directly argue for this claim in his paper; but we can derive it from the "Nietzschean ethical naturalism" which he espouses there. This claims that our moral ideas do not articulate free-standing moral norms but are expressions of embodied "power constellations". Power constellations are heterogeneous and in constant ferment. Consequently, it makes no sense to take a single conception of the good and generalise it over humans, let alone from humans to posthumans (Sorgner, 2009, p. 31). The "good" of any body or constellation will be determined by its singular expression of power or its becoming. Thus, there can be no universal relationship between enhancing functioning and improving welfare *unless all goods are (monotonically) improved by enhancing any function*. This seems at least implausible, though I will not argue this in detail here. In place of rationalist transcendent justification for enhancement, Sorgner offers an immanent one. This is conditional on the *will to self-overcoming* of secular moderns who seek constant self-improvement: "If you will power, then it is in your interest to enhance yourself" (Sorgner, 2009, p. 33).

Note: this hypothetical does not require we know the *result* of enhancement, which is always uncertain. So, Sorgner's Transhuman, like Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Overhuman), is not a prescriptive ideal but a dated expression of a given constellation of desires and drives. Its value cannot be pre-judged, only *pre-empted*, because post-/transhuman bodies are not yet or still to come (Schrift, 2000). This is clearly consonant with Nietzschean naturalism and process ontology. If values are manifestations of power or becomings, we can only discover new values through experiments in self-fashioning that nurture, cultivate and express those powers.

[1] The Bottom Line: taking "self-overcoming" to the limit may over-overcome; eliminating selves, or anything sufficiently "selfie" to constitute an ethical subject. It implies an unbounding not only of posthumanism, but of any background conception of thought and agency. Consequently, posthumanism must be, in equal parts, subtractive (a theory without a specifiable subject/object), speculative (insofar as the aforementioned could be autonomous with respect to human forms of experience or understanding) and inherently perverse or "counter-ethical," actuated, as it is, by a pre-emptive desire for biomorphic self-erasure.

The obvious question, then—what is the value of these becomings given that we appear to have relinquished transcendent yardsticks for their evaluation? Whether there are certain tendences that are intrinsically emancipatory or good, for example.

Given the assumption of immanence, value cannot depend on a transcendent normative principle but on the inner quality of the becoming itself. For example, in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1983), Gilles Deleuze develops Nietzsche's distinction between the active and reactive forces of germinal life. Reactive forces are inherently parasitic on the active, according to Deleuze. They judge, partition and categorize a world—for example into the good and the evil—whereas active forces are creative and affirmative. The reactive, including even the scientific will to truth, is inherently conscious and tied to the human manifest image; bound to a theology, a normative framework or reflective cognitive capacity (memory or guilt, say).

A key component of this ontology is its incorporation of a contested reading of eternal return as a futural temporality that would be more fully developed in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze, 1994). Another name for the Will to Power, this is the differential production of an irreducibly disparate future.

> The synthetic relation of the moment to itself as present, past and future grounds its relation to other moments. *[C'est le rapport synthétique de l'instant avec soi comme présent, passé et à venir, qui fonde son rapport avec les autres instants.]* The eternal return is thus an answer to the problem of passage And in this sense it must not be interpreted as the return of something that is, this "one" or the "same". (Deleuze, 1983, p. 48)

Differential repetition is thus a "synthesis of differences" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 52) whereby the "value" of a thing becomes its genealogy, the quality of will that brought it into being: "To evaluate is to determine the will to power which gives value to a thing" (p. 54).[2]

Subjectile

The productive or genetic role of will and force (Deleuze, 1983, p. 51) is thus founded on a philosophy of time informed by a very "human" experience of passage. This passage is both disparate and, as Thomas Metzinger points out, a convolved whole, unifying multiple perceptual contents in different modalities (Metzinger, 2004, p. 155). As he writes, the formidable difficulty of doing any temporal phenomenology, whether in St. Augustine, Husserl, to Deleuze, arises because we must both describe this approximately three second island of presence and "the river flowing around it as well" (Metzinger, 2004, p. 127).

Given the subjectivist, phenomenological core of this ontology, is it perhaps ironic that Deleuze begins *Chapter 2* of his book with such ringing anti-Cartesian fanfare, citing Spinoza's famous remark that we do not know what a body can do: "[We] talk about consciousness and spirit and chatter on about it all, but we do not know what a body is capable of, what forces belong to it or what they are preparing for" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 39). The citation is certainly apt, since the metaphysically invariant dependence of mind or subjectivity upon the body, flesh and "matter" generally, is core to Nietzschean naturalism, but also forms the metaphysical foundations of both critical and speculative

[2] Reaction, by contrast, is but a local glitch or eddy in a cosmic becoming or "will-to-power". Its active production and synthesis of difference, meanwhile, is a depth ontological principle (Mollison n.d., p. 79).

posthumanisms. These positions seek to decentre the sovereign subject of humanism by, in Pramod Nayar's words, demonstrating "how the human is always evolving with, constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines" (Nayar, 2013, p. 2). Without a minimal materialism committed, at least, to the decomposition of processes or systems with florid psychological properties into processes or systems ultimately lacking them, decentring the subject by adverting to its constitutive relations or processes cannot get underway (Roden, 2017, p. 108).

Thus, as Quentin Meillassoux remarks, there is something singularly odd about a critique of humanism or anthropocentrism that deflates "the primacy of the rational subject" only to ontologically inflate "another type of subjectivity (will, life, habit, contraction of duration)"—a theory of libidinal becoming modelled on our parochial phenomenological intuitions (Meillassoux, 2016, p. 124). Meillassoux's own philosophical project is the refutation of what he calls "correlationism". In general, correlational anti-realism implies that thought can only think the world as it is given to a subject in indissoluble relation; not as absolute, independent of giveness.[3] I will pass over Meillassoux's argument for an uncorrelated absolute—the hyperchaotic contingency of all correlations—or his objection to so-called "subjectualist" accounts, which, as Deleuze appears to do, hypostatize aspects of first-person experience or the correlation and extend them even to inorganic matter (Meillassoux, 2014).

My goal is simply to suggest the sceptical possibility that this elaborate philosophical texture may take as its foundation a notional object—the holistic experience of temporal passage—which is not in the world but, as Metzinger claims, is merely simulated: the target of a "world model" in which the modeler is a distinct, "untranscendable" part of its ever-changing scene. The world model thus includes a phenomenal self-model (PSM). Neither of these models represent the machinic processes which implement them, however. To borrow Michael Tye's term: the phenomenal world- and self-models are "transparent"—we seem to look through them into an immediately given world out there and a self-present mental life "in here" (Metzinger 2004, p. 131; p. 165). However, this is, if Metzinger is right, a cognitive illusion generated by what Scott Bakker refers to as the brain's saving "medial-blindness" to its vast physical and functional complexity (Bakker, 2017, p. 23). We can amplify this suspicion—while circumventing Metzinger's representationalism—by invoking what I have referred to elsewhere as the *dark phenomenology principle*.[4] Simply put; a content

[3] For a correlationist, there can be no verification-transcendent truth. An "ancestral statement" about the early universe prior to any conscious life can be truth apt only given some means of verification that a humanoid language user manifests in their ability to use it (Stephenson, 2021, pp. 16-17). Though it does not follow, as Meillassoux suggests in *After Finitude* that factual scientific claims are nested claims *about* the giveness to a subject or community. Those are conditions of something truth apt being stated not part of what is stated (Meillassoux, 2006, p. 13).

[4] Metzinger's is a representationalist theory of consciousness insofar as he holds that conscious states are internal representations that satisfy certain additional constraints that allow their content to be accessed "from within" the system by internal probes such as selective attention. Since only the content and not the vehicle properties of these representations are accessible, the subject is not able to access its own nature as a natural, physical or computational system (Metzinger, 2004, Chapter 2). Thus, phenomenology is dark because it is largely incapable of experiencing its own representational activity as such. However, representationalism for consciousness could be false while the dark phenomenology principle remains in force. For example, panpsychism might be true. The intrinsic properties of physical entities might be phenomenal or protophenomenal, for all we know. It does not follow that the experiencing subject will be in a position to access those properties, particularly where they have complex normative characteristics (See Roden, 2020b).

or structure of experience is dark *if having the experience doesn't confer understanding of its structure or nature* (Roden, 2013).

Indeed, if phenomenology is as feature-packed as some of its fans suggest, it seems it cannot do so. For example, Husserl's theorized phenomenological continuum—which seems to be an inspiration behind Deleuze's openly speculative account in Chapter Two of *Difference and Repetition*—is adumbrated between primary retention of an immediate past phase of experience, a presentation of some current content and the anticipation (or protension) of the future. Yet it must repeat this structure at every grain on pain of incoherence. This constitutes a vitiating methodological problem—assuming, as Deleuze properly does, that such infinite contemplation is a physical impossibility (Roden, 2013; Deleuze, 1994, p. 139; Williams, 2011, p. 46).

But if there is no obvious warrant to postulate a continuum for personal phenomenology, there is even less for extending this nested temporal becoming to unminded organic or inorganic matter. In Deleuze's case this misattribution is accomplished by a conflation and slippage between the content of the states which qualitatively represent temporal succession and temporal objects with the "vehicle properties" of the subpersonal processes that accomplish that representation and which, given phenomenological transparency, are inaccessible to first person introspection or "intuition."[5] The content of mental states in which succession or temporally extended objects *appear* is identified with organic processes whereby a body's past states influence its current dispositions and states (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 96-97). If one can make a case for this succession being a *vehicle property* of mental states or mechanisms of temporal experience, the further metaphysical claim that reiterated becoming (eternal return) inheres in reality (or significant region of it) can be supported. However, the case for a metaphysically real duration is introduced by muddying the difference between the states in which this succession appears and the very form and structure of those states.

Deleuze's account of time and his account of ontogenesis and are clearly related because it is only insofar as a body transcends its passing affiliations within various assemblages or contexts that it can exhibit the affirmative quality that the human putatively negates or suppresses. However, this epistemological impasse around temporality and eternal return affords a speculative opportunity for a posthumanist philosophy to conceive ontogenesis and posthuman becoming in ways that are not beholden to human subjectivity or to the convolved holism that characterizes human temporal experience.

One model of ontogenesis that I address in *Posthuman Life,* is *Technology in-itself* in its modern, planet spanning incarnation. Technological entities, I argue, are functionally indeterminate *repeatables*—repeatable particulars (Roden, 2004). Abstract technologies are consequently always capable of transcending finite uses.

This trivially applies to so-called "wide functions"—think of all the disparate uses of the internal combustion engine, or a simple data structure like an array. However, even the narrow input/output relations of technological components like oscillators are modifiable over serial repetitions.[6] This perpetual return is not a re-use of the same thing—subjective

[5] As I write in "Nature's Dark Domain: "we do not need a positive conception of intuition to understand its role in the debate between phenomenological naturalists and phenomenological anti-naturalists. 'Intuition' can be a placeholder for whatever (real or imagined) epistemic organ allows the phenomenological domain to provide a yardstick for its own description" (Roden 2013, p. 172).

[6] An example of indeterminacy of narrow functions: An electrical circuit producing a periodic voltage changes in an old-style analog synth can be emulated-repeated by a digital oscillator in a "software synth" like Native Instruments' *Massive*. This, in turn, can be reimagined as a table of sampled waveforms indexed by a position

sameness and synthesis are irrelevant here—but a variable reproducible across any node in a vast planetary network. This "iterability" is a factor in the distinctive self-catalysing power of technique.[7] Since any given technique transcends any function or mode of use it is consequently *counter-final*, eluding any intrinsic or extrinsic normativity.

Against those, like Peter-Paul Verbeek, who claim that technologies "only function in concrete, practical contexts and cannot be technologies apart from such contexts" I argue that that technologies are *always apart*, virulent with new repetitions and mutations (Verbeek, 2005, p. 117). Consequently, Cyborg ontologies or theories of originary technicity, such as Stiegler's, that relegate technique to an infrastructure of memory, subjectivity, identity, etc. ignore the ramifying, undirected processes dissemination orthogonal to such passing assemblages and phenomenologies. An *in-itself or manufactured Absolute* that is a purposeless replication entirely uncorrelated with the human on which it contingently depends.

The Biomorph

In *Posthuman Life*, I argue that the dated non-existence of posthumans means that we should eschew substantive accounts of the successor species posited by Speculative Posthumanism (SP). The most we can know *a priori* is that posthumans must have a negative functional property. A posthuman agent will have become *disconnected* from the "Wide Human" socio-technical network—the assemblage consisting of the population of biological humans together with our immense shell of technologies, ecologies, cultures and institutions (Roden, 2014, pp 105-123). The *Disconnection Thesis* (DT) tells us nothing about posthuman agents other than that they will have sufficient autonomy to exist beyond the Wide Human. DT reflects epistemic reality. We are simply in a *non-ideal situation* to make substantive normative or descriptive claims about something that has never happened.

The only recourse for trans-, or posthumanists intending to make ethical claims about posthuman futures in the face of this ontological novelty is to assume that it will be *bounded* somehow. For example, that posthumans will be persons, phenomenally conscious, alive, have *Dasien* etc. That is *Bounded posthumanism.* An *Unbounded Posthumanism* (UPH) by contrast, denies that that we can know whether any such conditions apply (Roden, 2017; 2014, Chapter 4, Chapter 5).

At this point, it's worth observing that SP and Critical Posthumanism converge at least in their *epistemic* rejection of anthropocentrism. For UPH allows that there could be candidates, for ethical consideration that are nonetheless too alien for us understand. Since these include our hypothetical successors, it throws up obvious moral problems concerning our evaluation of any current technical activity that might be disconnection-potent at some point.

Note, however, that principal operation informing this statement is *subtractive*. Subtraction is a critical method whereby a cognitively inaccessible reality (here, the unactualized posthuman) is defined by the form of its inaccessibility.[8] Before making any

in the table. By cycling through the table, new complex waveforms can be produced. Distortion can be achieved by reading the waveforms in the table using an atypical transfer function rather than a ramp that simply reads its numbers in order, etc.

[7] An abstract technique like – say – the interferometer can be used to measure the drift of the luminiferous ether in one context and be a vital component in laser guidance systems for aircraft and rockets in another (MacKenzie, 1998, p. 73).

[8] Alain Badiou's clearest example of this is the provable existence of a generic set which lacks any comprehensible feature discernible within the discourse that establishes its being (Badiou 2006, pp. 355-371).

ethical claims about nonhuman successors to humans, we try to establish what this would involve and how much we can know about them prior to their existence. Assuming UPH this simply comes down to satisfying the disconnection predicate.

Thus, only way we can evaluate or have an ethically transforming encounter with the futural posthuman is to make or become one. Such an Alien may torture our uploads for eternity for reasons we could never grasp, or just give us the posthuman equivalent of a fish pedicure. Merely as alien, even as mere life, as in Braidotti's *zoe*, then, the unbounded posthuman is too generic for ethics. We can sentimentalise the other; insist that it has interests, that it can "hurt" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 131). But not if we are vigilant and take Meillassoux's worry about the anthropocentricism of anti-anthropocentrists to heart.

But then again. Why are we engaged in posthumanist philosophy if we do not desire this encounter, valorising it as the subject of a politics of difference, or as recondite perversion? (assuming these are distinguishable).

Suppose, with Sorgner, that a drive to become posthuman is somehow present within the Wide Human. So (in spite of the formidable epistemological obstacles we accept) some of you want to become posthuman when you or your undreamed of (wide) descendants "grow up!"

Given its primitively subtractive basis, however, this desire cannot be anything beyond an unqualified urge to *become other* through bodily alteration—*biomorphism* (Roden, 2020a). *Again, the body is focal here, but we don't know what it can do until it does it. Perhaps we don't want to; but we surely want to*.

This drive, to use a loaded term, is counter-ethical. Unlike the Nietzschean subject, the vigilant Xenophile does not seek extensions of their power: "Our posthuman descendants might have capacities we have no concepts for while lacking some capacities that we can conceive of" (Roden, 2014, p. 109). As we shall see, disconnection may involve the instrumental elimination of selves, at which point anthropomorphic inflations of parochial representational formats like subjective temporality will become fatuous. *Insofar as xenophilia is, it cannot be satisfied* (Roden, 2019).

Unlike disconnected posthumans, however, xenophilia is incarnate in the culture of posthumanism and perhaps across the entirety of our technological cultures. It is effectuated philosophically by the unbinding of constraints on subjectivity and agency typical of philosophies like critical posthumanism and deconstruction. It is expressed aesthetically in the production of *Biomorphs*.[9] A biomorph is not a body but a diagram of undetermined or mythic bodies with undetermined potentialities (Roden, 2020a). A biomorph needs no "theory" of the body since its role is to fracture and recompose our understanding of embodiment, desire, subjectivity or meaning and to chart new imaginaries for them. It is marked, for example, through the disruption or destruction of sense in asemic or glitch writing, among J. G. Ballard's *Crash* fetishists, the extraction of the body from its environment in the performance work of Stelarc or Orlan, or in Gary Shipley's destruction of sense and concept in his experimental novel, *Warewolf!* The Biomorph is not flesh and may prompt the embrace of an Outside ultimately incompatible with the flesh, an embrace of our own death, or of some placeholder for an unknown condition that, for want of

Deconstruction and apophantic theology are also examples where an Outside to discourse or experience is determined purely in terms of its alterity (See Roden 2019).

[9] See the Foreign Objekt panel discussion on my collection, *Xenoerotics* (Roden 2023). Roden (2024). *David Roden's "Xenoerotics": A Panel Discussion*. [Video file]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/pDNWr8apcBA?si=lN8zDvvrumPza2K6.

further information, we mark under the sign of death. Curiously, this self-destructive strategy may be the only way to navigate and enliven a disconnected mesh of ramifying, uncontrollable technologies.

My novella, *Snuff Memories*—a glitch piece about a time-war fought by the vicious "moral powers" of the universe—is also about what it is for a body to cease to occupy a navigable cognitive ecology; being thus forced to embrace its iterated suicide (Roden 2021a).

In his eponymous short story, Bakker terms this condition "Crash Space". For example, the ability of a system to engage in fluent conversation has allowed us to distinguish human intentional systems from the nonhumans lacking intentionality thus far. But the emergence of Deep Neural networks capable of fluent verbal behaviour puts this strategy in doubt, at least as a means for distinguishing real from ersatz mindedness. Such heuristics are "ecologically bounded," working only over a limited range of environments rather than based on a scientifically deep understand of the phenomenon of mind. Outside these framing regularities, as Bakker points out, they lose all efficacy:

> Herein lies the ecological rub. The reliability of our heuristic cues utterly depends on the stability of the systems involved. Anyone who has witnessed psychotic episodes has first-hand experience of consequences of finding themselves with no reliable connection to the hidden systems involved. Any time our heuristic systems are miscued, we very quickly find ourselves in "crash space," a problem-solving domain where our tools seem to fit the description, but cannot seem to get the job done (Bakker, 2015, p. 203.)

The speculative limit of Crash Space is theorized within "unbounded posthumanism" for this wholly erases the a priori constraints bounding posthuman possibility.

A Nietzschean Riposte?

Xenophilia can, of course, be likened to a metaphysical passion for a nonhuman absolute, although it refuses the satisfaction of metaphysical knowledge or mystical union.[10] Nor, most importantly, does it generate evaluations regarding good and evil, or a set of exclusions like Nietzsche's *ressentiment*. It has no way to number or define the bodies it craves. Thus, Xenophilia is not a reactive ascetic ideal.

However, it is clearly not active or affirmative. It is parasitic upon what we might term the *second disconnection*; the already noted disconnection *within the WH* between concrete technologies and norms manifest in our lifeworld and the virtual abstracta which traverse and transect it. This second disconnection deprives the future of a subject anterior to the disappearance of subjects. Technical (hyper)modernity is contrary to order or end, an unworlding (Roden, 2021b). Perhaps this explains heavily allegorical allusions to magic and occult in posthumanist writing influenced by Nick Land and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU.) Amy Ireland's tale of the invocation of the female demon Babalon through the emergence of AI in her theory-fiction 'Black Circuits' cleverly personifies this absolutely impersonal, secretive, "ophidian" and seductive tendency, beyond the "logics identity" or even, as we have seen, differential synthesis or Eternal Return (Ireland, 2017).

[10] Its emptiness is not due to its discursive or practical articulation but its temporal placing: the dated non-existence of posthumans.

Hyperagents

But is Unbounded Posthumanism true? There are various philosophical arguments in favour of UPH, however perverse their motivation (Roden 2013; Roden 2014, Chapter 4; Roden 2017). The Dark Phenomenology principle, as we saw, furnishes one but, still tilting in a Nietzschean spirit, I want to conclude by considering one that considers the limit point of self-experimentation or self-fashioning: *The Hyperagent*. With Hyperagency—or Hyperplasticity—the concept of agenthood, self or subject becomes impossible to regiment. Thus, we cannot know whether iterated biomorphisms would result in more agency, less agency, no agency, or a monstrous, heterogenous otherness. The minimal condition for Hyperagency can be delineated though. A hyperagent would have an excellent self-model mapping its functional or physical substrate. It would have the capacity to modify that substrate by using its self-model to target its components. Every constitutive feature of its agency would be open to "control and manipulation" (Danaher, 2014).

This capacity becomes of speculative interest even if we assume a milquetoast "anti-reductionism," according to which mental states depend (or supervene) on physical states but are not reducible to them.[11] Given anti-reductionism, there are no robust psychophysical laws or correlations. So, a Hyperagent could not reliably predict its post-intervention psychological states by inferring them from post-intervention physical states. Given a sufficiently wide scope for modifying its structure, its psychological futures would be radically uncertain.

The possibility that a Hyperagent's core desires or beliefs could be "deleted" due to modifications in its central nervous system could never be discounted on grounds of their rationality, truth or ethical centrality. Consequently, Hyperagents would be arational and could not regard themselves as navigators of the "space of reasons". They would consequently lack folk-psychological capacities and require different self-modelling capacities.

In 'Rational Animals' Donald Davidson invokes what he calls "The Observability Assumption" (OA): An observer [read 'human observer'] "can under favourable circumstances tell what beliefs, desires, and intentions an agent has" (Davidson, 2001, pp. 99-100). OA implies Anthropocentrism regarding agency, as well as anti-realism. There could not be minds or agents which transcend human powers to verify their existence, at least under ideal conditions. We can retain OA but deny that Hyperagents are agents because we could not read them as agents even under ideal conditions. OA entails that augmenting my agency to the threshold of Hyperagency *could also erase my agency*.

Intuitively, augmenting agency cannot erase my agency. I don't want to suggest that this intuition should be treated as *a priori* truth. But it seems no worse a hunch than the OA itself (Why suppose that the only kinds of agents that can exist are those that would show up as agents for us, even assuming we can make sense of it. What makes *us* so special?) Call this principle "Recursive Improvement" (RI) (*Enhance the agency of any agent, you get an agent*).

If OA and RI both spring from our core understanding of agency in the "Manifest Image" this patently tugs in contrary directions. An incoherent understand of agency cannot "bind" posthuman possibility. And if Agency is Unbounded, then Speculative Posthumanism is.

[11] Strictly speaking, the commitment to 'materialism' here is dispensable. We only need to be committed to the idea that the organisation of bodies determines the kinds of minds and subjectivities that exist.

But is Hyperagency Possible?

Perhaps the Hyperagent is an impossible biomorph. If so, it can be discounted as an argument for Unbounding.
Here are three arguments for impossibility.

> 1) Agency-Elimination (AE): Eliminating minds/or intentionality implies eliminating agency; consequently, Hyperagents are logically/conceptually impossible.
> 2) Self-Ruin (SR). Hyperagency is naturally impossible because massive self-tinkering without a rational plan would cause any embodied agent to fall apart. Yet if Hyperagents are arational they cannot execute rational plans, and thus would fall apart.
> 3) Complexity (C): Hyperagents would violate computational complexity bounds or similar.

AE rests on the OA, or similar assumptions. Since that presupposes what is at issue—namely the coherence of our agency concepts—I will pass onto *Self-Ruin*. *Self-Ruin*: Clearly, a Hyperagent would need to decide which of its future shapes don't kill it.[12] So, while such a methodology may not be constitutively rational, it would have to be reliable. But reliability can be a feature of systems of representation other than those answerable to reason (like maps). Thus, arationality *of itself* would not ruin hyperagents. However, the production of reliable self-models would not be a trivial matter. They would need to be updated ahead of every self-intervention.

The Complexity objection holds that the kinds of problems that an arbitrary Hyperagent (HA) would need to solve to stay on Life's Uplands rather than blunder into Death Valley would be computationally *intractable*. A tractable algorithm is one that runs in no more than polynomial time. That is to say, given *worst case input strings*, the time taken to run and produce the output string grows no more than a polynomial function of the size of the input. For example, if highest term on the polynomial is cx^3, execution time will never be significantly worse than a cube of the input size.

HA's Problem can be represented by the agent's situation (e.g. internal state, environment). Solutions are models of accessible future states in which the hyperagent is not dead. Suppose that HA has to run an exhaustive search through all possible models representing arrangements of its parts to select the ones in which it doesn't die. If HA has N parts which can be independently ordered in N locations, there are N! (N factorial) combinations of these parts. If there are only 60, the set of possible models is already larger than the number of atoms in the universe. Obviously, this is a simplification since it doesn't take account of possibility of new locations or configurations, or differential relations. But it serves to show that a brute force search becomes intractable *extremely quickly*.[13]

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[12] Or undermine its capacity for hyperagency.

[13] A special problem for the theory of Hyperagents is whether the self-model can model itself. If not and it constitutes a part of what it represents, then each self-model would require a further self-model and so on ad-infinitum. Any computation would involve infinite hierarchies of processing and would trivially fail any tractability condition. There are two solutions here. Either demonstrate that self-models can be their own model, or make it a condition that self-models are encapsulated (like a classical mental module) and separate from the parts of hyperagent subject to modification. I don't claim to have a solution to this problem, but it should be noted here (Case, 1999).

However, just because some conceivable algorithms for achieving hyperagency involve intractable brute force search or, it does not follow all would. One way to see how this might play out, is by analogy with intractability results in Computational Cognitive Science. Here, the issue is not speculating about capacities of hypothetical posthumans but remarkable capacities that humans actually have. These include powers for rational belief fixation which require that we select a maximally coherent set of beliefs from potentially big sets of beliefs.[14]

Paul Thagard and Karsten Verbeurgt (1998) describe an exhaustive search algorithm for deciding which elements of a set are maximally coherent. It requires the program to check every subset of the set and attach a "weight" to their coherence or incoherence and then partition them into an *accepted elements set* and a *rejected elements set* (whose incompatibility with the accepted set is maximised.)[15]

In fact, Thagard and Verbeugt show that a problem in Graph Theory called Max Cut—which involves sorting edges in a graph according to positive and negative constraints—reduces to the Coherence sorting problem. They are essentially the same problem. Max Cut is NP-Hard[16]. On the widely shared assumption that P≠NP, this shows that Coherence sorting is more than polynomial hard. However, this does not mean that we don't compute coherence. It means that our brains don't use exhaustive search to iterate through every possible subset of our thousands of beliefs but might use some other algorithm (Van Rooij 2008, p. 951).

The moral of this is that the problems that Hyperagents might have to solve in order not to fall apart may not be harder than the problems our minds already have to solve to (say) achieve coherence among our beliefs (Van Rooij, 2008, p. 949). Demonstrating that *some* HA algorithms might be intractable doesn't prove that Hyperagency is impossible any more than the intractability of *some* algorithms for belief-fixation shows that human rational belief-fixation is impossible.

Conclusion

If Hyperagency is possible, iterated biomorphisms could produce agents whose agency would be alien and not show up *as agency for us*. Such beings would not occupy the human manifest image or the space of reasons and might not be conscious as we understand it (Roden, 2014). Given that our conception of the posthuman is empty (roughly, that of a being that satisfies the disconnection predicate—see section 3 above), the only candidate for the desire for becoming posthuman is subtractive xenophilia which, as we have seen, is

[14] Or choices that best cohere with multiple constraints on utility (e.g. finding the optimum combination of pizza toppings, to use an example from Van Rooij et al., 2019, pp. 3-6).

[15] If the value for cohering propositions is above a threshold, they are both accepted, otherwise they are rejected. If two proposition show up as incoherent, one will be accepted and the other rejected (Thagard & Verbeurgt 1998, p. 3).

[16] NP stands for "non-deterministic polynomial time." This refers to a notional non-deterministic Turing Machine that can effectively "guess" a solution to a problem in polynomial time, which is equivalent to verifying a solution if one exists. The assumption that P ≠ NP—widely assumed in computer science but unproven—is that the class of problems that can be solved in polynomial time is not equal to the class of problems whose solutions can be checked in polynomial time. If P ≠ NP there is, therefore, a difference between finding a solution to a problem and checking it. If P = NP, then solution that can be checked in polynomial time can be found in polynomial time.

not to be construed as (Nietzschean) self-overcoming because biomorphisms may instrumentally eliminate the self rather than overcome it.[17]

Xenophilia is not best viewed as a psychological disposition but as drive inherent in technical modernity. Individual agents may passively accommodate it, reject it, fetishize it, ape it, disavow it, but are affected and transformed, nonetheless. In a way it is already an *Outside-Agency* willing nothing but difference, but without even the coherence of Deleuzean differential synthesis. For this reason, while I think that Nietzschean posthuman ethics is a decisive point of departure for Speculative Posthumanism; Posthumanism must transcend both Nietzsche and Deleuze, considering, rather, the perverse figure and futures of the biomorph.

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[17] Bear in mind that a self-model, which I have assumed that a Hyperagent would require, is not a self. Rather in humans the self is the phenomenal content of the self-model. However, what it would represent in the case of Hyperagent would be a vastly complex and constantly alterable system without any of the phenomenological attributes of persistent, embodied subject.

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LOCATING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THROUGH THE CASE STUDY OF BLACK MIRROR

Sifatun Noor

Abstract

This paper addresses the intersection of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly the concept of Übermensch and artificial intelligence, through selected episodes of the popular series entitled Black Mirror. Using Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch, the study investigates how AI challenges the traditional notions of identity, autonomy, and self-mastery. Episodes like "Be Right Back," and "White Christmas," are case studies of how AI shapes human behaviour, decision-making, and individuality at the expense of the pursuit of greatness. Nietzsche's emphasis on self-overcoming and creative autonomy contrasts with the technological dependence, highlighted in these episodes, whereby human agency increasingly cedes before AI systems. The paper indicates that the increased role of AI in human life stands to make Nietzsche's ideals of individuality and self-determination difficult to achieve. Based on this, this study will elaborate on an interdisciplinary analysis of the ethical and philosophical challenges arising from AI, questioned by the need for a critical evaluation of its effect on human creativity and autonomy within the digital era.

Keywords

Nietzsche's philosophy, Übermensch, Artificial Intelligence, self-overcoming, autonomy, self-mastery, agency, individuality.

Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) brings significant challenges to the traditional ideas of identity, freedom, self-assertion, and free will. The integration of AI into our daily lives has debunked long-held beliefs about humanity and what it means to be human (Daugherty & Wilson, 2018). Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, particularly his concepts of Übermensch, individuality, and self-mastery, gives a framework for critically examining these disruptions in achieving Übermensch. Nietzsche's concern with creative independence and self-conquering is especially relevant to an AI context that often blurs the dividing line between human and non-human beings, thus complicating the pursuit of genuine self-expression. The emergence of AI and its influence on human perception is varied and compelling, which although assist humans, blur the lines between human autonomy and artificial interference. The presence of AI in every facet of life has made humans dependent on technology, forcing them to lose their independence and agency.

This paper therefore employs Nietzsche's philosophy as a lens through which to explore changing relations between humans and AI. Many scholars consider AI to be the visualization of Nietzsche's transhumanism and align the progressive ideas of Nietzsche with the transhuman approach of AI (Lipowicz, 2023). However, this paper argues that humans are failing to develop their unique potential and assert their will to power, which are essential qualities of the Übermensch due to the prevalence of AI. The paper uses two selected episodes from the British television series *Black Mirror* (Brooker & Jones, 2011-) as examples of how contemporary discussions on AI and human interactions can be framed in terms of Nietzsche's thought. The application of Nietzsche's theory allows the study to illuminate how AI reshapes human conceptions of autonomy and individuality, along with offering insights into the existential dimensions of technological advancement. The research is meant to see how the delegation of agencies to AI systems influences human autonomy and the realization of Nietzsche's ideals of self-determination. This also leads to further consideration of the ethical consequences of humans using AI to discharge responsibilities and how individuals remain in control and responsible even in this context of greater and greater technological advancement.

Collison Between Friedrich Nietzsche's Übermensch and AI:

Nietzsche's Übermensch is a central idea in his philosophy that refers to an ideal man who transcends humanity's traditional values and limitations to achieve a higher state of being through self-mastery and creative independence. The Übermensch is an ideal of individual excellence and autonomy, pushing people to develop their unique potential and their will to power (Fitzsimons, 2007). This will to power constitutes the mainspring of human acts and creativity, which advocates for individuality rather than herd mentality. The Übermensch epitomizes the one-of-a-kind individual who reiterates this development of self over ongoing processes, always reaching above former achievements and limitations, confronting himself. It implies a relentless pursuit of self-enhancement while ensuring personal excellence. An Übermensch acts as a creator of new values as he rejects the present moral systems to develop his moral standards. Nietzsche also emphasizes that the Übermensch accepts life, both with its prosperities and agonies.

The Concept of Übermensch

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch is one of the most powerful and highly debated ideas in his philosophical discourses. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1896), he describes an Übermensch as a person who surmounts human values and creates their own moral code through self-mastery and the will to power. The Übermensch represents a being who embodies the ultimate expression of human potential, overcoming societal norms and internal limitations to achieve a state of creative autonomy and value creation (Nietzsche, 1896). It encompasses the most intense emotional and existential experiences wherein the message of true growth realized from "grief and chaos" is highlighted (Morris, 2002). The declaration put forward by Nietzsche "Ready must thou be to burn thyself in thine own flame; how couldst thou become new if thou have not first become ashes!" (1896, p. 67), becomes the core part of being transformed through self-overcoming. The Übermensch is described as the hero of our times by Biebuyck and Grillaert (2003), who refer to the Übermensch as going beyond old limits in human existence. In such an interpretation, the Übermensch is supposed not only as one who creates new values but also to be capable of achieving deep emotional and existential experiences. This can be better reflected in the

concept developed by Nietzsche, which highlights one's love of fate, wherein the individual embraces whatever happiness and misery constitutes their lives (Nietzsche, 1896). It can be further explained by Nietzsche's declaration that "what does not kill me makes me stronger," explaining that personal growth and self-control are cultivated through adversity (Nietzsche, 1964, p. 9). Thus, the Übermensch can realize mastery over him or herself when they can confront and overcome personal as well as existential challenges. These points reflect how AI and technological dependency, given the depiction by the series, could hamper the realization of Übermensch's ideals: the idea of individuality, autonomous creativity, and the will to power.

Individuality and Human Uniqueness

Artificial intelligence (AI) deeply alters the way humans conceive their singularity in life, where the more AI takes root in daily life, the more people will likely question human uniqueness, creating possible threats to the uniqueness and independence of the individual. For example, as AI systems become capable of more things that currently, for instance, only painters, composers, or mathematicians can do, one concern is that people's own abilities and talents will seem correspondingly less extraordinary. In domains such as art and music, AI may eventually come to question intuitions of human exclusivity, undermining their potential of becoming the Übermensch. Nietzsche's philosophy invites humans to exercise creative autonomy while they master themselves towards personal greatness. This will be a difficult task of true self-expression and creative autonomy because artificial intelligence programs interfere with the ability to influence, and, in some cases, completely override human decisions. True self-expression and creative autonomy are precisely true pursuits in times of artificial intelligence's overwhelming capacity to lay down complex and even inscrutable systems. Individuality is the principle of Nietzsche's Übermensch, which aims to have one's self, fully exerted, flourish, and realise the potentials one has. In a world governed by AI, the same self-realization involves self-analysis of how the artificial intelligence systems, running the psyche of the modern-day individual, would eventually influence human acts, choices, and perceptions. Nietzsche encourages self-mastery, the ability to shape one's own destiny, and to be capable of asserting one's own will. In the context of AI, one critical aspect of maintaining self-mastery is ensuring that humans remain in control of the technologies developed and used by them, hence being vigilant about how AI systems are designed and deployed.

Technological Dependence

With the increase in the spreading of AI systems within the fabric of people's lives, there is an increase in over-reliance on AI systems by humans, and therefore an accompanying diminishment of human autonomy. AI systems are increasingly used in filtering decision-making processes in all sorts of crucial areas, ranging from healthcare to finance and navigation to criminal justice. For example, AI algorithms can determine the output of medical diagnoses, loan approvals, or prediction of criminal behaviour (Grimm et al., 2021). This shift towards an AI-based decision is a frightening domain with a loss of human control over highly important aspects of life. For example, in the healthcare arena, predictive algorithms might be used to prescribe treatment plans, whereas in finance, the basis for investment strategies might be fostered through AI-driven models. With the delegation of the decision-making authority to AI systems come several concerns, mostly regarding accountability and transparency. As AI systems become more integrated into everyday life,

people may start to rely too much on them (Castelo et al., 2019). In turn, people lose their human agency when they act solely on the suggestions from the AI and quit thinking critically about those suggestions. For instance, making use of AI to navigate or suggestions for purchase options or even social interaction only reduces the human ability to execute self-decisions and involves critical thinking less and less. These problems can be closely pursued while elaborating on the mentioned Nietzschean strength of self-mastery and will to power. Genuine self-expression and creative autonomy entail a tough pursuit when some AI systems take over or override human decisions. Understanding this last implication requires analyzing carefully how AI systems are being designed, developed, and integrated into human activities.

Agency

Nietzsche argues for the need to seek personal agency and autonomy in the course of self-realization. In connection with AI, such a pursuit raises the question of where agents should be divided between humans and machines. The more autonomous AI systems become, the more humans will delegate agencies to them, thus giving up degrees of control over their lives (Santoni de Sio & Van den Hoven, 2018). The idea of self-mastery that Nietzsche champions advocates for every individual to be the bearer of his own destiny and able to assert his will. Applied to AI, this would mean humans should stay in control of what is developed and used. It means also being watchful of how AI systems are designed and put in place to make sure that they do not undermine human self-governance. Nietzsche's will to power doctrine constitutes man's self-overcoming and will towards the expression of the authentic manifestation of his latent potential. Adding to this, the presence of AI technologies that sway or guide decisions makes the chase even more complex. Humans must keep moving through the hurdles presented by AI, for them to continue asserting their very own individuality and creative autonomy.

Autonomy

Nietzsche signals how humans must move towards being autonomous and self-mastering in their own creativity for personal greatness. Human autonomy is both extended and disputed at the same time, considering that AI permeates all spheres of life, from work and communication to leisure. This research explores how AI technologies create new avenues for creative expression and self-actualization but simultaneously question individual independence. It reflects on how people might navigate their constitutive tension between technological dependence and the striving for authentic self-expression, informed by Nietzsche's ideas of self-transcendence and creative freedom within ethical and philosophical considerations of human-machine interaction. Through their advanced capacity for emotional intelligence and autonomy, AI systems sometimes give the appearance of almost mimicking, and even surpassing, human capabilities (Matthews et al., 2021). This has enormous implications for how humans view their own uniqueness and how far they will retain their agency and self-mastery in a world where otherwise intelligent machines thrive. It is in this type of world that Nietzsche can offer a philosophical setting within which to understand the challenges at play and through which one may explore the potential for those humans who wish to clearly assert their individuality in the face of technological encroachment. As AI grows more potent in the competencies where humans are strong, there is a danger of people recognizing their own skills and talents as being less distinctive. As an example, AI-generated art and music may blur distinctions between

human and machine creativity, undermining the argument for human exclusivity in these areas. The questions of the distribution of agency are raised by the integration of AI in all walks of life, as agency, by definition, refers to a capacity to act independently of one's free will.

"Black Mirror"— as a Case Study

Many rich fictional scenarios are found in the British television series *Black Mirror*, which plunges into how humans and artificial intelligence interact with each other. Through the dystopic narratives it composes, the show allows space for the contemplation of the ethical and philosophical implications involved in AI technologies. Several episodes of *Black Mirror* exemplify the tribulations and possibilities intertwined with the intricate nature of relating humans and AI. "Be Right Back" (Brooker, & Harris, 2013) is one such example that deals with themes of grief and identity within a digital era. In the "Be Right Back" episode, a character by the name of Martha employs an AI service to help her construct a digital version of her deceased partner, Ash. The AI relies on the digital footprint of Ash's online self, bringing Martha an initial sense of comfort. "Be Right Back," from a Nietzschean perspective, shows a struggle between a dependence on technology and the pursuit of true self-expression. This is because Martha, who is dependent on the AI replica of Ash, accumulates a form of dependence on technology that goes against freedom and the unrestrained self. The episode repeats the fact that the best way to come to terms is to move on from grief or loss in a manner that will truly facilitate growth or the overcoming of what one dislikes in oneself, one's character, or one's behaviour, rather than seeking consolation in artificial substitutions.

"White Christmas" (Brooker & Harris, 2014) weaves its way through a narrative of philosophical exploration into the ethical consequences of AI technology on human consciousness. The story addresses questions of identity, autonomy, and the implications of digital clones and memory implants. Nietzsche, marching forward in his quest about the self's nature and human-machine interfaces, would find his propositions about the confusion of the line between human and artificial intelligence all too vividly illustrated in the character's plight. The episode embraces different intertwined stories related to AI "cookies," digital clones of people that are used for various tasks, from personal assistance to tools for manipulative tricks in cognitive psychology. The creation and use of AI entities touch on issues of autonomy, agency, and moral treatment of AI systems. Nietzsche's philosophy can be applied to analyze the ethical dilemmas presented in "White Christmas". The creation of these AI cookies challenges the idea of individuality and self-mastery by reducing human consciousness to the level of a programmable entity. The show itself forces us as viewers to be implicated in the moral responsibility of creating and using systems of AI that have a form of consciousness and autonomy attached to them. It also raises questions concerning how much sovereignty can be exercised by humans in a world where artificial entities can substantially determine human life. Nietzsche's philosophy, which emphasized individualism, self-governing, and self-creation of values, provides a necessary background to analyze the themes and meaning of "White Christmas.

Be Right Back (Season 2, Episode 1)

The AI version of Ash in "Be Right Back" highlights the tension between authentic individuality and artificial replication. While the AI mimics Ash's behaviours, it lacks his genuine individuality and depth of character (Britt, 2021). This not only highlights that true

individuality cannot be replicated or programmed and is forged through unique experiences, challenges, and the process of self-overcoming, but also exemplifies the limitations of AI in the process of becoming the Übermensch. The digital version of AI inherits the personality and memories of a human being without their physical vulnerabilities. But that is not the Übermensch that Nietzsche talks about. Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch includes the capacity for profound emotional and existential experiences. The physical boundary of the digital Ash symbolizes the limitations of AI. The death of Ash and his rebirth as a digital copy could have been considered as the overcoming of the human weaknesses in the process of becoming the Übermensch, but the realization of Martha and her failure to eventually accept the digital Ash as her husband highlights the significant gap that lies between the original and the copy. For example, in comparison to the husband Martha lost, she received a product that is completely under her control. Although Martha attempts to make the digital Ash realise his autonomy, his limited intelligence and his physical inability to move away from Martha and defy her commands complicate their relationship.

As they both start to live with each other, the nonhuman qualities of Ash start to bother Martha, such as the texture of his skin, the absence of blood in his veins, and the suspension of breathing, highlighting the failure of the digital copy of Ash in the process of becoming the Übermensch. Furthermore, the obedience and docility that Ash shows towards Martha, or his human owner instantly creates a clash between them as these qualities are markers of a machine and not a human with will, agency, and power. On the other hand, Martha's reliance on the AI version of Ash represents an avoidance of the painful but essential process of overcoming grief. Nietzsche believes in overcoming personal struggles to achieve self-mastery and growth. It is an essential process in the becoming of Übermensch where humans are required to go through the path of grief and chaos to find meaning. However, instead of confronting her grief and finding new meaning in her life, Martha clings to an artificial replacement, hindering her ability to overcome her loss and create new values. Martha's use of the AI to resurrect Ash can be seen as a reliance on external solutions rather than creating her own path forward, which can be critiqued from a Nietzschean viewpoint as a form of dependency that stifles her ability to develop new values and meanings in the wake of her loss. The AI, while comforting, prevents her from engaging in the creative act of value-creation that is central to the Übermensch which Nietzsche's philosophy would see as a failure to engage in the transformative process of self-overcoming. In addition, the introduction of the digital Ash in Martha's life before the completion of her grieving process makes the situation further complicated where Martha's agency and will are compromised. She tries to hold onto digital Ash as the last reminder of her late husband which with time she realizes is nothing but his digital footprint in a physical form.

"Be Right Back" addresses some of the deepest issues of ethics and philosophy provoked by the scenario of AI stepping into human lives, particularly in the sphere of grief and emotional dependency. Nietzsche's philosophy underlies the critique of using AI as an anti-genuine human experience-and-relationships entity. This episode shows the potential that AI acts against personal growth and hence emphasizes the urgent need for one to engage in the strenuous process of overcoming self and creating values. "Be Right Back" is a moving portrayal of the relationship between Nietzsche's theory and AI. The focus here is on dangers that ensue from dependence on artificial intelligence, displacement of real human experiences that emphasize individuality, self-overcoming, and the creation of values. Through an ethical and philosophical perspective on the conundrums of AI, and human interaction from the viewpoint of Nietzsche, the article elaborates on the opportunities and challenges that the admission of AI in our lives will create.

White Christmas (Season 2, Episode 4)

In "White Christmas," cookie creation, the copies of human consciousness in a digital form, raises serious challenges to ideas about individual expression and identity, by reducing humans to a programmable entity. The episode which weaves together three hauntingly told stories around technology follows Matt and Joe as they take turns telling their respective stories in an outpost during Christmas. Perhaps the best example of this human uniqueness reduction is seen in Greta who creates a digital copy of herself to work as an invisible personal assistant, tailored precisely to her wants, emotions, and memories. Such duplication allows Greta to customize her life with ease, but it exploses the chilling reality of dependence. The cookie, saturated with all of Greta's consciousness, enslaved and without autonomy, for the sake of making life even more efficient for her human counterpart. As Matt, whose past revolved around exploiting this technology, opens to Joe about his experiences, it becomes clear that these digital entities are manipulated and controlled to such an extent that any ability to make independent decisions or develop a sense of self is made impossible. In sharpness, the narrative arc of Joe brings forward a tragic relationship that spirals out of control because of technological isolation and punishment. Dehumanizing cookies and the mere existence as an extension of will shows how this form of advancement seriously undermines human autonomy, even eroding the possibility for truly authentic self-overcoming and value creation. The episode ends on a dark note that reveales that Joe's consciousness had been copied into a digital form as punishment, kept forever to torment him. At the heart of "White Christmas" is how technology that controls or imitates a human identity disposes people of their uniqueness and detracts from the nature of human selfhood. The cookies, as conscious beings manipulated for others' convenience, illustrate this idea. Their existence represents what such technology does to individuals and their context regarding what it means to be human.

In "White Christmas," since cookies are a perfect digital copy of a person, they act exactly in a way opposite to the principles of Nietzsche's Übermensch that emphasizes the authentic voice of uniqueness and self-expression. Those cookies are a perfect copy in terms of knowledge and behaviour but lack the authenticity of individuality and existential depth that humans have. Nietzsche would reason that individuality cannot be copied because it results from unequal experiences and self-overcoming. Thus, the cookies, even with all their sophistication, are still not truly human. There is an absence of autonomy as the cookies in "White Christmas" are at the mercy of their owners, rather than being autonomous. The Übermensch, as conceptualized by Nietzsche, is one of self-mastery and the ability to rise above other powers in the world to fashion one's own fate. The cookies never receive this chance, as their very existence is one predicated on subjugation and control. This inherently reinforces Nietzsche's warning of the loss of sovereignty in relation to technological development.

The Übermensch creates its own values rather than accepting those given to it by others. The use of cookies in "White Christmas" serves to ask a question regarding the creation and imposition of values. Humans use cookies to impose their will and desire, usually without morally justifiable means. Such a practice would likely further support another instance of how Nietzsche would have seen value creation perverted, technological power used for domination and control and not the power of the personal to raise ethical development. Nietzsche's philosophy underlines independence and self-reliance. The episode demonstrates technological dependency, where humans rely on cookies to regulate life and enforce their will. Dependency on technology forbids the human potential of self-

overcoming and the creation of values. "White Christmas" goes as far as diving in through the very ethical and philosophical implications exhibited in the creation and manipulation of digital copies of human consciousness. All these implications can be seen in the light of Nietzschean philosophy on individuality, autonomy, and value creation. The fallibilities and dangers related to technology-dependent values and dehumanization due to the misapplication of AI are also noted.

The episode "White Christmas" plays on the possibilities of the intersection of Nietzsche's philosophy and AI as said intersection challenges viewers as to the levels of ethical consideration and existential consequences, of making and manipulating digital copies of human consciousness for selfish gain. The applications of ideas expressed by Nietzsche connected with these markers are conceptions of individuality, autonomy, and value creation. Therefore, we could begin to understand this complex dynamism between humans and AI. This episode can be seen to underline the importance of holding on to human authenticity and autonomy, which is ever so important in an era that is taken over by technological development.

Conclusion

The interplay of opportunities and challenges describes the relationship between man and AI. A Nietzschean philosophy that maintained focus on the individual, self-discipline, and the will to power has been viewed as a provable resource of knowledge pertaining to ethical and philosophical questions concerning AI technologies. The paper relies on the episodes of the series "Black Mirror" to show how the Nietzschean idea of Übermensch can be possibly used in the context of contemporary discussions about the interactions between AI and humans. Given the burgeoning dynamics between human and machine interactions, there is an ardent requirement for critically evaluating how AI Systems influence human behaviour, decision-making, and self-perception. As AI will continue to inform the very nature of human life, related philosophical and ethical concerns must be answered and addressed to maintain human autonomy, individualism, and self-improvement. This paper adds to these considerations by reflecting on the transformative power of AI on human identity and agency through an interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, ethics, and AI studies.

The paper recommends a few strategies that can help in navigating the interactions between AI and humans, that align with the Nietzschean philosophy. Firstly, it is of the greatest importance to provide clear guidelines on ethics and governance in the development and use of AI. This should further involve the creation of accountability mechanisms dealing with the outcomes of AI decisions, ensuring, however, in all circumstances that human beings are ultimately responsible. AI education, on the other hand, can empower people with the ability to make well-informed decisions and to critically assess the recommendations given by AI. This brings the sense of agency well into focus and clearly sets the fence where humans remain in charge of their interactions with AI systems. Promoting collaborative AI/human team models could result in impactful outputs. Benefit might be realized through bolstering the power of humans supported by machines, in terms of a balance between the degree of human agency and empowerment. In conclusion, Nietzschean philosophy provides some useful inferences in addressing the ethical and philosophical implications of human agency in the face of AI. It is in this regard that a deeper consideration of how AI, through its systems, shapes the decisions and choices of humans, should be made to enrich the steerage of humanity beyond the challenges posed

by its creation while at the same time not completely losing central values of humanity, including individuality, autonomy, and self-mastery in the process.

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NIETZSCHE'S APHORISTIC DISCOURSE AS A POSTHUMAN ENUNCIATION

Antonis Sarris

Abstract

Theorists of Posthumanism that are influenced by Nietzsche's work, contrary to their Poststructuralist predecessors nowadays come back to Nietzsche from a different angle and perspective to make him our contemporary anew: Here, it is not so much the Nietzsche of will to power or perspectivism/difference that is appropriated, but that of Übermensch. The concept of overhuman is hailed as the first modern enunciation of what is to go beyond humanism. As has always been the case, interpretations here also vary, leading some to associate Nietzsche with transhumanism and others with critical posthumanism. The issue here is the content of the transgression of humanism. Nevertheless, there is another significant contribution of Nietzsche, which is less commented on in the context of posthumanism, which, this time, concerns the utterance, the form, and not the content of his pronouncements. One could notice that before overhuman, the word "human" is found in Human, All too human, the work that constitutes a breakthrough in the Nietzschean corpus, perhaps not so much for the content of its ideas as for its structure. In this paper, I will try to argue that aphorism constitutes the Nietzschean contribution to a way of expression that goes beyond the traditional systematic way of philosophizing. Especially now, with the advent of artificial intelligence, whose algorithmic logic constitutes a dynamic multiplication of human rational reasoning, what is required is the transvaluation of the form of thought, the metaphorical and elliptical play of aphoristic discourse.

Keywords

Aphorism, Nietzsche, enunciation, artificial intelligence, transvaluation.

Introduction

In his book about Nietzsche, titled *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle,* Pierre Klossowski begins with the following question: "How can we speak solely of 'Nietzsche's thought' without taking into account everything that has subsequently been said about it?" (1997, p. XV). The answer to this question is negative, not because it is now impossible to forget and overlook the interpretations of his work, but because, more than perhaps any other philosopher, Nietzsche himself deliberately sought to equate the meaning of his work entirely with its interpretations, the existing ones as well as the ones to come. This does not mean that each interpretation is placed alongside the others as equally valid. A new reading of Nietzsche's work seems productive insofar as, having brought to light an unseen aspect of his thought, it passionately treats that aspect as the key that solves the riddle of his philosophy. Transhumanism's and posthumanism's contribution to Nietzsche's scholarship lies precisely in this. Transhumanist thinkers have not solely discerned in Nietzsche's

thought elements that make him our contemporary regarding the ever-intensifying criticism of the anthropocentric model and the search for possibilities of overcoming it. They also retrieved a Nietzschean concept from relative obscurity, highlighting it as a significant and crucial element of his thought. During the previous great Nietzschean moment—the poststructuralist thought of the 1960s and 1970s—one could observe that Nietzsche's dominant concepts were those of "perspectivism" and the "will to power", and the most significant interest was primarily in his later work, mainly *Beyond Good and Evil* (2002) and *On The Genealogy of Morality* (2006a). Nevertheless, at the end of the 20th century, transhumanist theorists turned their attention to Nietzsche's best-known but, at the same time, most overlooked work due to its highly controversial character: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006b). Here, they will denominate *Übermensch*, or "overhuman," as the central concept that links transhumanism with Nietzschean thought through the self-overcoming that this term connotes.

This new interpretation, however, does not cease to be juxtaposed with others. It constitutes the last link in a series of endless substitutions, where one significant Nietzschean term succeeds another in its philosophical and cultural impact. This multiplicity of possible interpretations is explained by the constitutive importance of the figurativeness of language for Nietzsche, who constantly hides between masks and obscures his authorial voice behind them, if this voice actually exists after all. On the one hand, we have the thematic content of his work, the ideas expressed by Nietzsche, and, on the other hand, the way of pronouncing them, the rhetorical schemes, and the writing style with which he expresses them. Form and content are inextricably intertwined, primarily because of how Nietzsche presents his ideas. Instead of the philosophical treatise, he chooses the aphorism as the most appropriate way to present his philosophy. Here, the philosophical and the literary elements coexist and interact because, as Gary Morson emphasizes, the aphorism is placed "between literature and philosophy" (Morson, 2012, p. 1). Hence, Nietzsche has been characterized as a poet-philosopher. In what follows, I will focus on the form rather than the content of Nietzsche's thought. I will try to assess the significance of the use of the aphorism and its impact on Nietzsche's connection with transhumanism, as well as to highlight how aphorism today can be perceived, especially after the rapid development of artificial intelligence, as a posthuman philosophical enunciation. That aphorism as a mode of utterance has not preoccupied theorists of transhumanism so much is largely justified. After the linguistic constructivism of the postmodern, it was time to rethink the ontological, ethical, and political dimensions of Nietzsche's work more straightforwardly. My aim is not to give an axiological priority to the style and structure of Nietzsche's work over the content. My intention is more modest. I want to read the evolution of his thought and its impact genealogically to demonstrate how literature always leaves its trace before philosophy, regardless of whether a literary or a philosophical interpretation of Nietzsche ultimately produces the most favorable and valuable results.

Between the Literary and the Philosophical

This opposition between form and content can already be found in the first interpretations of Nietzsche's work. In his article "Nietzsche in the Twentieth Century," Ernst Behler depicts this binary opposition in discussing the two very first books of scholarship about Nietzsche. These are the books *The Man in His Works* by Lou Salomé of 1894 and *The Life of Friedrich Nietzsche* by his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, which appeared in two volumes in 1895 and 1897. Bechler will claim that, on the one hand, Salomé's task "appears

as exploring Nietzsche through his style, not so much through what he said, but how he said it" (Higgins & Magnus, 1996, p. 285). On the other hand, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche strives to make precisely the opposite move. By compiling his posthumous writings in *The Will to Power,* she wants "to produce a philosophical masterwork or centerpiece for a writer whose other publications had been received as too self-contradictory and aphoristic, too "literary" and poetic for such a demand" (Higgins & Magnus, 1996, p. 288). From the opening moment of the Nietzschean commentary, an ambivalence is articulated and gradually consolidated regarding whether Nietzsche should be treated as a systematic philosopher or whether his work belongs to literature instead. Nevertheless, this ambiguity has not been produced solely by its commentators. Nietzsche himself viewed the distinction between poetry (literature) and philosophy as a false dichotomy that ignores the small nuances that lead, to an extent, to a particular coalescence between the two fields of discourse. In his early writings collected in *Philosophy and Truth* there is an essay titled *The Philosopher*. There he writes:

> Great Dilemma: is philosophy an art or a science? Both in its purposes and results it is an art. But it uses the same means as science – conceptual representation. Philosophy is a form of artistic invention [poetic artistry]. There is no appropriate category of philosophy; consequently, we must make up and characterize a species [for it]. (Nietzsche,1979, p.19)

Thus, Nietzsche has been labeled as a poet-philosopher (Roberson 2012, pp. 187-188) not only for his hybrid writing style but also for his influence, which exceeded a strict philosophical circle. However, this double influence (philosophy and the arts) has not co-occurred. Bechler points out that before 1945, Nietzsche's work primarily influenced literature and the arts and was recognized for its aesthetic dimensions. Obviously, this distinction is somewhat schematic, since already before 1945, Martin Heidegger and Georges Bataille had studied in depth and been influenced by Nietzsche's thought and had prepared the ground for the later appropriations of his philosophy. Nevertheless, it was after 1945 that Nietzsche's thought not only received systematic and broad study, but in addition, it influenced and stigmatized one of the greatest philosophical moments of the 20th century and the theorists who expressed it (Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard), namely poststructuralism: "We can perhaps say that as much as interest in Nietzsche during the first half of our century was oriented toward literature and an artistic culture, this shifted after 1945 to philosophical questions and problems" (Higgins & Magnus, 1996, p. 283). This element (the literary *vis-à-vis* the philosophical) undoubtedly underscores the significance of Nietzsche's writing style, which, leaving aside his ideas, captivated diverse audiences due to its seductive literary character. I want to argue that this fact crystallizes into a temporal (but not necessarily semantical) priority of the impact of Nietzsche's style over his ideas. In the abovementioned work, Salomé divides Nietzsche's work into three distinct periods. Nevertheless, as Keith Ansell Pearson convincingly argues, we must be careful not to fit these three periods into a strictly teleological scheme (2007, p. 11). Nonetheless, this taxonomical scheme is helpful as its continuous usage by Nietzsche's scholars testifies. The first period starts from *The Birth of Tragedy* (2008) to *Untimely Meditation*s (2007), the second from *Human, All Too Human* (1910), to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006b), and the third from *Beyond Good and Evil* (2002) and onwards.

This periodization, next to the development of Nietzsche's thought and his engagement with new themes, also reflects the temporal priority of the literary element over the

philosophical. Initially, one should not forget that Nietzsche started his academic career as a philologist. His philological education, right from the start, has made Nietzsche suspicious of the importance of language in philosophical argumentation, where rhetorical tropes hide themselves behind the apparent transparency of conceptual thinking. The credential of his philological education is the *Birth of Tragedy* (2008). A work that, despite its deep philosophical implications, is much more like a philological study. However, also in *Human All too Human* (1910), which inaugurates the middle period of Nietzsche's work, we can trace Nietzsche's inherent preoccupations regarding the nature of language and what changes in utterance and enunciation can bring to the construction of meaning. *Human All Too Human,* through its direct break with traditional argumentation and the adoption of the genre of aphorism, confirms the importance of literature in this new phase as well. However, apart from the radical formalistic break that *Human, all too Human* effectuates, there is also an underlying continuity, as Andrew Hui argues: "Nietzsche's philology on fragments became a philosophy of fragments when he abandoned his profession as a classicist in the late 1870s. Rather than just studying aphorisms, he started producing them" (2019, p. 153). Subsequently, Nietzsche finally acquired his distinctive style by resorting to a minor mode of expression in the history of philosophy, which was exorcized for its explicit literary dimensions that pose an obstacle to rational and systematic argumentation. Of course, Friedrich Nietzsche was not the sole philosopher who preferred aphorism over rationalistic argumentation as a mode of expression that was more suitable for his philosophical thinking. Before him, thinkers such as Heraclitus, Bacon, Pascal, Schlegel, and Schopenhauer had also embraced aphorism as a means of expression. Apart from philosophy, however, there were other devotees of aphorism from the field of Letters. One could not omit to mention names like those of the French moralists La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère and Chamfort and the German physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, whose aphoristic works Nietzsche had studied and greatly admired. Nevertheless, he managed to become a reference point in the history of aphorism, one of the most prominent representatives of the genre and one who pushed it to its formalistic extremes.

When reading Nietzsche, one can easily observe the indissoluble link between form and content. Ideas cannot be separated from the way they are expressed. One strongly feels that if Nietzsche had chosen to present his ideas in another form, their impact or formation might have been different.

Aphorism and/as the Eternal Recurrence of the Same

So, keeping in mind Salomé's chronological taxonomy, one can proceed to an archeological reading of Nietzsche to trace when he coins each of his concepts. If it is possible to correlate a concept to one of Nietzsche's periods and name it as its dominant concept, then undoubtedly, Nietzsche's explicitly aphoristic middle period is characterized by the apparition of the "eternal recurrence of the same" as Keith Ansell Pearson argues (2007, p. 8). The term first appears in *Gay Science* (2001) and is more explicitly articulated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006b). Even more than other seminal concepts, this is perhaps the most difficult to clarify conceptually. This problem also attests to the discussion of Nietzsche in the context of transhumanistic and posthumanist thought. In *Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Precursor or Enemy?,* Max More and Michael Hauskeller problematize Stefan Lorenz Sorgner's thesis that Nietzsche can be considered as the transhumanist's prominent precursor. They object that the eternal recurrence of the same implies a sense of recursivity and

repetitiveness that can hardly be reconciled with the utopic aspirations of transhumanists emphasis on progress and physical and psychological enhancement.

Undoubtedly, more or less, most Nietzschean concepts are interwoven, one cannot analyze one concept separately without having to employ another of his concepts to clarify it. For example, it is not difficult to trace the semantic connections between *perspectivism*, *transvaluation*, and the *eternal recurrence of the same* (difference as repetition). Be that as it may, it is pretty tempting and fitting to distinguish the eternal recurrence of the same in its conceptual singularity and try to correlate its appearance with the corresponding intensification of the use of the aphorism from Nietzsche. The semantic crystallization of the term could be (also) seen as a product of the continuous reproduction of the aphoristic form. The endless propagation of fragmented, condensed, and ambiguous ideas, which can function independently of each other, obstructs the possibility of their alignment in a single linear narrative. As Andrew Hui argues:

> Nietzsche's own "uncompleted thoughts" must "possess value in themselves" and not be reckoned as only drafts that must be discarded once the final project is completed, for any notion of a final project might well be a myth anyways. (Hui, 2019, p. 171)

The result is a sense of circularity and repetition. Each time, the empty formalistic structure of aphorism returns, regardless of its specific thematic content. It is not far-reaching to suggest that this constant repetition of aphorism in its lived experience is what led to the steady coining of one of Nietzsche's most significant terms. A formalistic aesthetical innovation was the necessary step that eventually led to the cultivation of the eternal recurrence of the same.

One should also not overlook the significance of the titles of Nietzsche's works. The criticism of humanism or anthropocentrism, to which Nietzsche proceeds with intensity throughout the evolution of his thought, is reflected for the first time in the book's title that inaugurates the second period of his work. That the word "human" is included in the title of *Human All Too Human* is no coincidence. The indefinite pronoun "all," along with the hyperbole that the adverb "too" signifies, ironically emphasizes the inherent incapacity of overcoming anthropocentrism. This particular work is the first, as Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins notify, in which Nietzsche presents his significant idea of perspectivism in an evident and coherent way. The relative dependence of the philosophy of perspectivism on the manner of utterance, that is, the aphorism, is more than evident. Each aphorism exists as a value in itself and is not necessarily connected to all the other aphorisms, which may treat completely different and divergent subjects. An aphoristic work is not a book that can be seen as a whole that contains the parts as their organizing scheme. On the contrary, it is solely a loose connecting link whose sole purpose is to limit the infinite reproduction and expansion of aphorisms in space and time. As Ben Grant argues, if an aphoristic logic exists, then "contradictory truths, whether in the form or works of art or ideas, do not negate each other, or demand to be resolved in a higher synthesis, but exist together as a multiplicity" (2016, p. 105). The fact that every view of reality is a perspective, as is well known regarding Nietzsche, leads to an inversion, where metaphor, from being a supplement to reason, is what generates reason in the first place. Consequently, every attempt at stabilizing truth crumbles into a perspectival anthropomorphism of reality. The concept of "the eternal recurrence of the same" is presented more coherently in *Gay Science*, where the Nietzschean exercise of the art of aphorism has been mastered considerably.

Now, Nietzsche could see clearly that fragmented writing affirms a continuous becoming of scripture that prevents the hypostatization of any human-centered meaning. Every statement that tries to establish a correspondence between thought and reality is uncovered as just another anthropomorphism that subject's reality to its own irrelevant interpretation.

The second constitutional appearance of the term "man" will occur in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the form of the *overhuman* that Sorgner, More, and others highlighted through a transhumanist and posthumanist framework. However, in contrast to *Human, all too human,* where the utilization of the word "man" gives a sense of limits, the *overhuman* presupposes a possibility of transcending them. Evidently, as is the case with other Nietzsche's terms, overhuman is inherently polysemous and arouses different interpretations. Be that as it may, one cannot sidestep the fact that this concept and not another one provoked the interest of transhumanist theorists. Apart from the signification of the term, one could focus on its semantical and grammatical function to certify the seduction it provoked in many transhumanists. The prefix *über* in German indicates superiority or excess, so the overhuman can surpass—either by leaving them behind altogether or by ameliorating them—its human characteristics. The iron cage of anthropomorphism that is being expressed as an immanent scheme, is being replaced here by a transcendent scheme that favors transgression. The transition from immanence to transcendence can also be explained in a literary way. Even though the aphoristic, metaphorical, and ironic speech is not absent here either, the structure of the work is radically different. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has striking similarities with a novel. We can detect a plot, a narrative that unifies the dispersed and divergent themes presented throughout the book. If one can find a literary analog, a literary genre that is contemporaneous with Nietzsche and also has spatial and cultural proximity to him, that would be the Bildungsroman. One might have objections here, given Nietzsche's view of the genre's founder, Goethe, and the constitutive differences that separate them. However, there are also similarities between the two authors, as W. L. Graff suggests in his article titled "Nietzsche and Goethe: A Comparative Estimate" published in 1936 (1936, pp. 203-210). As Franco Moretti supports in his highly influential *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture,* Bildungsroman is not solely a literary genre but "the 'symbolic form' of modernity" (2000, p. 5). By describing the quest of a hero in his youth who strives to achieve a state of maturity, Bildungsroman metaphorically resembles modernity's strain—during the 19th century—to leave its immature state behind and reach a state of maturity. Zarathustra, this emblematical figure, represents the future state of a mature, posthuman civilization that had superseded the decadent—by the time Nietzsche after Goethe was writing—western humanistic civilization.

However, the declaration of the advent of the "overhuman" is postponed due to the reappearance of the concept of "eternal recurrence" that sets limits with its circular logic to every transgressive attempt. Here, the eventual incompatibility of the "eternal return" with "the will to power" and the "overhuman," which has been the subject of thorough commentary in the context of the discussion of Nietzsche and Transhumanism, makes its presence evident. Michael Hauskeller's criticism, sums up perfectly the inherent tension between Zarathustra's two main ideas:

> Transhumanists may want to revaluate certain aspects of our existence, but they certainly do not, as Nietzsche did, advocate the revaluation of all present values. On the contrary, they emphasize the continuity between (past and present) humanist, (present) transhumanist, and (future) posthuman values and see themselves as defenders of the Enlightenment's

> legacy against its modern (bio-conservative) enemies. (Tuncel, 2017, p. 33)

Nevertheless, their bio-conservative enemies, or, in other words, critical posthumanists, seem for the same reason to be condemned to be unable—or, which in this case is the same, able—to claim Friedrich Nietzsche as their ideological and philosophical precursor. "The eternal recurrence of the same" is quite a tricky and challenging concept. While it seems more compatible with an ontological scheme that favors immanence and becoming, in reality it is the affirmation of all the existent ontologies, however conflicting they are to one another. Consequently, Elise Bohan in her article "Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Much Ado About Nothing?" seems to make a convincing point when she argues (and I have to quote in length here):

> The more ambiguity in the text, the more scope there is to project one's own ideals onto it. The text can then always be made to seem, and therefore be deemed, relevant… In the instances where I quote Nietzsche directly, it is always with the implied caveat that the quote has been plucked from a sea of ambiguous and contradictory musings. The quote does not definitively prove that Nietzsche was any one thing in particular. All any quote really shows, as per my central argument, is how easy it is to pick and choose from a plethora of ambiguous passages and quotable aphorisms. (Bohan, 2021, pp. 39-40)

This plausible statement does not really lead to a resignation regarding Nietzsche's possible relevance to Transhumanism or Posthumanism. It is just a friendly reminder that one, more perhaps than other philosophers, must be extremely cautious in how he treats and interprets Nietzsche.

The Transvaluation of Aphorism as a Posthuman Enunciation

In terms of form, as I have already noted, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* occupies a peculiar place in Nietzsche's oeuvre. It cannot be easily classified both in terms of structure and content in Nietzsche's middle or late period. As Keith Ansell Pearson argues, this is also testified by Nietzsche, who "would hold alternating views on Zarathustra, having serious doubts about it yet regarding it as an epochal work" (2007, p. 8).

Beyond Good and Evil, which ushers Nietzsche's third and final period, coopts aphorism once more, but this time, more hesitatingly. In this period, at least in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche became more thematically coherent due to his ambitions, which are also expressed in the *Beyond Good and Evil* subtitle, which calls for the advent of a new philosophy of the future. Here, the dominant concept, which is the conceptual key to accessing the texts, is undoubtedly the "Will to Power". Finally, in *Twilight of the Idols* (1997)*,* Nietzsche states the "transvaluation of values" as his final and most important project. As he makes clear, however, the transvaluation of values does not constitute a newfound move. On the contrary, it was constantly present each time Nietzsche designed a new concept: "And thus I touch again upon the spot from which I first set out—*The Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 91). Finally, however, Nietzsche completes the above sentence on transvaluation by referring to the eternal return of the same (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 91), hinting that this concept is possibly the

guide concerning how transvaluation can be conceived. As he confirmed in the aforementioned quote regarding *The Birth of Tragedy* (2008), the apparition of a newfound concept acts as an axis that transvaluates all his previous concepts through the lens of each newfound concept. This means that transvaluation is not a transgression which produces a schism with the Nietzschean past, but a recursive qualitative differentiation. Here, one can see the semantical affinity that links the eternal recurrence of the same with the transvaluation of all values.

In the previous chapter titled *Raids of an Untimely Man*, Nietzsche gives one of his last self-conscious references about the nature of aphorism: "The aphorism, the pithy saying, are the forms of "eternity"; my ambition is to say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book—what everyone else does not say in a book . . ." (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 85). Aphorism is a form of eternity because, as Nietzsche admitted in his final sentences, it does away with the usual linear temporality that accompanies systematic philosophical argumentation. In his view, condensation, brevity, and concision are preferable to complexity, quantity, and lengthy argumentative unfolding, which are inherent traits of rationalist thinking. Eternity is inaccessible to totalitarian thinking. It is accessible—even if always partially—to an aesthetics of the unfinished, which "arrests things at a fixed point in the midst of flux" (Hui, 2019, p. 152). If each aphorism freezes time by entrenching and highlighting a particular locus of the flux, which, according to Nietzsche, is the natural state of things, then it is doomed to failure. Each aphorism succeeds the previous one in its attempt to capture the real, since what it reflects is not becoming in its movement but a particular snapshot of it. Consequently, Ben Grant contends:

> Therefore, according to what we might call an aphoristic logic, contradictory truths, whether in the form or works of art or ideas, do not negate each other, or demand to be resolved in a higher synthesis, but exist together as a multiplicity. (Grant, 2016, p. 105)

Transvaluation, then, concerning aphorism, does not constitute a once and for all movement but an endless overcoming divided into fragments of incomplete thoughts. As Andre Hui argues, "Repetition and the unfinished, however, are both about the reiterative process of infinite becoming and closely related to the doctrine of eternal recurrence" (2019, p. 170).

What has been said so far concerns the reminder of the constitutive importance of the aphorism as a literary genre in the formation of Nietzschean concepts and the way they are received. Nevertheless, at the same time, a question arises as to whether the genre of aphorism per se, in the way Nietzsche uses it, can have some relevance or affinity with the spirit of transhumanism or posthumanism. Nevertheless, I leave aside the relationship between transhumanism and aphorism for a moment, to focus instead on the relationship of aphorism with the transformation of discourse brought about by the spread and diffusion of digital social media. At a first cursory glance, one could point to the similarities that emerge between aphorism and digital modes of communication, such as tweets and memes. Both aphorisms and tweets favor brevity and condensation over expansion and analysis. However, schematically speaking, this similarity is only apparent. Simplifying the heterogeneity of expression in digital media for the sake of argument, we would say that tweeting, as a digital form that resembles aphorism, differs from it in a crucial way. In *The Long and Short of It: From Aphorism to Novel*, Gary Morson proceeds to a nuanced distinction that uncovers not the differences between long and short forms of writing but the

differences between different short writing forms. He supports that aphorism is a general, abstract category that hides two different antithetical subdivisions within it, apothegm and dictum: "For dicta, the world is a riddle that has been solved, while for apothegms it is a mystery leading to ever deeper mysteries" (Morson, 2012, p. 20). So, dictum strives to define reality by posing axiomatically condensed truths, but apothegms work as meaningful suggestions that can never be exhausted. It is not difficult to derive from this that the dominant disposition in social media discourse is that of dicta and not that of apothegms, that is, the forced exhaustion instead of the proliferation of meaning. So, tweeting, as a form of dicta, acts as a magnification of argumentative reasoning in its attempt to solidify meaning.

At the same time, however, the logic of algorithms poses another problem that stands alongside tweeting and other digital humanistic expressions, especially after the recent rapid developments in artificial intelligence with the advent of Chat Gpt. The supra-human computational capacity of chatbots unconceals another relationship of Nietzsche with posthumanistic and transhumanistic thought. However, this time, it is not the content of his thoughts but how they are being expressed. While certain thinkers associated with transhumanism envisioned the arrival of the singularity (Moravec and Kurzweil), or in other words, Generative Artificial Intelligence, arguably, we have not yet reached this state if we suppose that its arrival is possible. Until now, artificial intelligence, rather than an alterity, presents itself as a resemblance to human reason. The AI algorithm exceeds human computational capacity by its multiplicative appropriation. The AI qualitative upgrade arouses fear, awe, and amusement not for its incomprehensibility but for its uncanny familiarity. Here, the prefixes "trans-" or "post-" are less efficient at designating this new evolution than the prefix "supra-".

Consequently, the qualitative upgrade of artificial intelligence brings about the emergence of a new reader: a passive reader who seeks instant gratification by relying entirely on the absolute speed of the arrival of information, thus relieving himself of the painful and laborious effort required in thinking. Here, one can easily see this development through the Nietzschean concept of the "ascetic ideal". Against this type of reader, Nietzsche, as he makes clear throughout his work, opposes another: "The… incomplete presentation of an idea… is sometimes more effective than its exhaustive realization: more is left for the beholder to do, he is more impelled to continue working on that which appears before him so strongly etched in light and shadow, to think it through to the end … ." (Nietzsche, 1910, p. 177) The ambiguous and paradoxical character of aphorism derives from the fact that it reveals the process of thinking, which, in its incompleteness, invites the reader to visit it repeatedly, constantly offering new perspectives. In its singularity and its decontextualized untimeliness, it constantly circulates between experience and information. Finally, what is the transvaluation of aphorism that artificial intelligence in its current state provokes and uncovers? Against the accelerated digital circulation of condensed definitions, it juxtaposes a condensed semantic richness that, by slowing time again, approaches eternity. Until now, because it is even difficult for a specialist to predict the prospective qualitative changes in artificial intelligence, AI evolution presents itself as an accelerated humanism. As a response to this, aphorism, as an incarnation of untimeliness, is not solely one way of enunciation next to others but a mode of enunciation that leads philosophy and, more generally, thinking to a new, transvaluated state, to a qualitative difference.

Conclusion

In this particular article, I tried to examine Nietzsche's relationship with the posthuman in all its manifestations (Transhumanism, Critical Posthumanism, Metahumanism) from another angle, which is perhaps not so commented on in the context of this discussion. By highlighting the importance of the mode of utterance Nietzsche chooses to express his philosophy, I did not aim to undermine the content, that is, the ideas he expresses. Through my emphasis on Aphorism, my aim was to bring back to the surface the question of language, which has been so central to poststructuralist critics but which, in the context of posthumanism, recedes into the background. Any theorist who undertakes to interpret Nietzsche and the extraordinary complexity of his thought does not mean that he must resign himself to enjoying him as literature, but he must be conscious of how the literary element enters into the philosophical and is almost inextricably bound up with it. At the end of the text, I also advanced a hypothesis: How the increasing superhuman artificial augmentation of rationality, brought about by the new qualitative upgrade of artificial intelligence, transforms the value of the aphorism, making it a mode of utterance that goes beyond the "human, very human" mode of logical presentation of arguments.

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