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# The New Technologies and Camouflaged Mythologies of Transhumanism

**Abstract:** The present crisis caused by the Covid 19 virus brings about worldwide debates about the taming of human nature in the sense of improving our biological and genetic endowment. The new technologies, with all their promises, upsides and hazards, play an important part in this. These debates continue older ones about improving the human species and gradually transforming it into a posthuman, technologically augmented entity. The philosophical movement that holds these ideas is called *transhumanism*. Our thesis is that transhumanism – a stage in the evolution of the human species towards posthumanity – is saturated with the camouflaged presence of very old myths (the myth of human invincibility, the myth of eternal youth, the myth of immortality, the myth of human ubiquity, the myth of *homo deus*, the myth of *deus otiosus*). These myths are consubstantial with the human being, and therefore they will survive even in a possibly trans/posthumanist future.

**Keywords:** human nature, new technologies, magic, myths, transhumanism, posthumanism, extropianism.

## 1. What is transhumanism?

Invoking the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, George Bondor reminds us of the almost agonistic dispute between two drives characteristic of human nature: the one towards cruel *barbarism*, on one hand, and the one towards a stabilizing process of *taming* human nature, on the other. As a matter of fact, the two human drives coexist. However, one of them prevails at a given time. The present situation, caused by the evil unleashed by Covid 19, enables us to argue that the drive towards the *taming* of our human nature in its biological version is having the upper hand. There are also extreme forms of this drive. One of them is *genetic manipulation*. "Is there the danger of unrestrained use of genetic interventions with a view to a better conservation of the human being, to defending and saving the species? For instance, by the genetic selection of births, so that the new individual should be endowed with a higher biological resilience and even a higher degree of intelligence?" (Bondor, 2020, pp. 92-93). Indeed, there is. This tendency to better the human nature with the aid of genetic and technical tools is called *transhumanism*.

The issue of transhumanism continues to stir contentious reactions worldwide. Western literature is engaged in polemics about transhumanism. Its governing

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ideas were clearly expressed in a “transhumanist manifesto” in 2002, its main authors being two remarkable philosophers: Max More (a British-born American) and Nick Bostrom (A Swedish-born professor at Oxford). The latter also wrote an informative history of transhumanist thinking, accessible at <http://www.nickbostrom.com/papers/history.pdf> (Mărgineanu, 2017, p. 110). In its essence, the transhumanist perspective is “the result of a technocultural reality which excels in cross-breeding species and taxa, the biological and the artificial, or the human and the nonhuman” (Petroșel, 2018, p. 9). All these would ultimately lead to a new human model, one generically called *posthumanism*.

Nowadays, there are enthusiastic authors like Michio Kaku who predict a promising future of transhumanism and a ubiquitous social presence. One of them is Ray Kurzweil. This famous person set up a series of successful firms in order to trade his inventions in fields such as the optical character recognition, computer generated speech and music synthesizers. He was awarded 20 honorific PhD diplomas as well as the National Medal of Technology, and he was immortalized in the Hall of Fame US Patent Office. The *Inc.* Magazine once called him “the rightful inheritor of Thomas Edison” (Ford, 2019, pp. 309-310). However, his ideas are not unanimously accepted. On the contrary, they continue to stir stupefaction, mistrust or enthusiasm. Those who accept his nonconformist views believe in the future of transhumanism and of posthumanist society. “Transhumanism, instead of being a branch of science fiction or a frontier movement, might become an essential part of our very existence” (Kaku, 2018, p. 339).

In its essence, transhumanism would be a step towards something *other* than humanism. To be more specific, it would mean a step towards our fusion with the new technologies. These would result in the posthuman entities of the “centaur teams” which means a blend of human features and technology in equal measure (Y. Harari). Another means of achieving the transhumanist dream would be the *biogenetic* one, which entails the cleansing of our genetic heritage from all impurities and keeping only those elements which stimulate the development of the human individuals and their transformation into *super human beings*.

An ultimate form of posthumanism would be *extropianism*, which pushes posthumanism towards its limit. Max More initiated it, and his interpretation of transhumanism fetishizes the importance of technology in human evolution. More specifically, “extropianism is the philosophical trend that explicitly highlights the expansion of the human potential and the individual transformation through technology from the perspective of a dynamic optimism” (Pușcaș, 2016, p. 79).

Beyond all these reasons, the ultimate goal of transhumanism is the leap of evolution towards “completely anorganic forms of intelligence” (Rees, 2019, p. 172). These fantastic entities will have long-dreamed-of powers, which are now to be seen only in science fiction movies. So far, the evolution of the human being has been the result of biological, natural and social factors working in tandem. We have now reached the turning point when we need to accelerate and control the human evolution with the aid of the new technologies. Why is that so? Because human beings are imperfect and finite. The science of the future will make them perfect and infinite, i.e. virtually immortal. This new and at the same old figment of

the human imagination, a hybrid of flesh and blood and silicone will be able to survive the challenges of the future. This dehumanized creature might virtually colonize yet other planets in the universe. This is finally the great future dreamed of by today's transhumanists for the homo-transsapiens or posthuman entities of tomorrow. The transhumanists are convinced that this dream will become reality through the magic power of the new technologies.

## **2. The Promises of the New Technologies**

The new technologies continue to stir polemics in the western and non-western world. These polemics are exacerbated by the present crisis caused by the Covid 19 virus. Some authors declare that they are definitely against these new technologies, while others worship them. The latter also point out the upsides of these new and challenging technologies. Here are a few significant examples.

The first example refers to the paralyzed human *body* set in motion by the power of the mind, with the aid of the new technologies, of course. At the Football World Championship in Brazil, "a man kicked a ball, thus giving a start to the competition, an event watched by a billion people" (Kaku, 2018, p. 340). Apparently, there is nothing spectacular about this. In fact, the man who kicked the ball was completely paralyzed. However, he had a chip in his brain, which was connected to a laptop. This helped him to move his paralyzed leg, using the power of his own mind.

The next example also refers to the desire to overcome *paralysis*. Many people have suffered serious damages of the spine. Their paralysis was caused by war fighting or road accidents. At last, with the aid of the new technologies, they will be able to use their arms and legs again.

Another dream of the transhumanists is the activation of our *telepathic* and *telekinetic* capacities, Michio Kaku argues. This could become reality due to a chip that would detect and decipher our cerebral waves, transmitting the information on the internet. Stephen Hawking is a famous example in this sense. Hawking suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. His entire body was paralyzed. However, he managed to press a switch to select phrases, words or letters by using a small computer attached to his wheelchair. How was he able to do it? Due to an infrared switch mounted on his spectacles. The switch, detecting Hawking's cerebral waves, was an interface with the computer. So this can be done...

In these situations, the switch or the chip is the new *magic* instrument which turns the unusual powers of our mind into the reality of our world. The old initiation scenario is now performed by the new technologies. The specialists of the old cultures and religions who looked into sacred matters have been superseded by the tech-savvy transhumanists. The results of such experiments could be absolutely stunning, and the expectations of the fans of transhumanism are a perfect match to the possibilities offered by the trend. "It's easy to imagine that, in the future, telepathy and telekinesis will become the norm, and that we will mentally interact with the machines. Our mind will be able to switch on the light, to access the internet, to dictate letters, to play video games, to communicate with friends, to order a cab, to shop or to play movies of its choice – all this through

thinking only” (Kaku, 2018, p. 346). This is the transhumanists’ beautiful and appealing dream, yet just a dream.

Another fabulous transhumanist promise is to make the spiritual reality of *communion* possible. The miracle would also be based on the power of the new technologies. The clear reference is the evolution of the internet. The next stage in the process of its development would be the creation of a *cerebral network*. What will be its role? “Instead of transmitting information bits, the cerebral network will transmit emotions, feelings, sensations and memories” (Kaku, 2018, p. 348). Thus, all of us could have a more thorough approach to the classical process of communication. We would go beyond the mere exchange of information to reach the *communion* in pain or in joy. Beyond the contemporary individual’s inherent limits, the future has in store a *super human being* capable of empathy for all the others. The transhumanist’s final goal is the creation of the *posthuman*, an entity that would transcend humanity. The challenge is that transcending the human will be doubled by an involution of the natural. For the transhumanists, this is not a problem for the simple reason that what we deem to be *natural* today is in fact a cultural convention.

### 3. The Camouflaged Mythology of Transhumanism

As I argued in my book *The New Secular Religions* (Gavriluță, 2018), transhumanism is, in its essence, a new secular religion. It is obviously a religion turned on its head, fake and inauthentic. Nonetheless, the faith in the soteriological power of the new technologies works like religion in the lives of certain people. This thesis has also been held by other authors (Lilley, 2013; Fuller and Lipinska, 2014; Hauskeller, 2016). Although Ray Kurzweil vehemently denies any connection between his research and religion, the professor of religious studies Robert Geraci of Manhattan College argues that a “Kurzweil’s cult” is likely to appear. All these new beliefs are a new “religion” based on *reliberium*, a sort of one’s own religion which worships the idea of personal freedom. Max More’s *reliberium* would allegedly be the peak of human evolution. It contains, in equal measure, humanism, transhumanism, posthumanism and extropianism.

From the perspective of the history and sociology of religions, the really interesting aspect is that transhumanism is saturated with the presence of certain classical myths of humankind, which survive, more or less camouflaged, in the scientific and cultural scenarios of transhumanism. In my book *The New Secular Religions* I argued the camouflaged presence of certain myths in transhumanist thinking. To be more specific, I mean *the myth of human invincibility* and that of *eternal youth*; the *myth of immortality* and of *human ubiquity*; the myth of *homo deus* and that of *deus otiosus* (Gavriluță, 2018, pp. 167-180).

As a matter of fact, references to the old mythology can be found in the texts written by the theorists of transhumanism. Nick Bostrom, for instance, in his book *A History of Transhumanist Thought*, frequently refers us to the restoration of the importance of mythology in people’s lives to be found in the Greek mythology. In the first place, he refers to Prometheus, the hero who disobeys Zeus’s command

and steals the fire in order to help people. Another reference is to Daedalus, the one who dreams of overcoming the human condition by flying.

Another great myth of humankind is *immortality*. One of the leaders of transhumanism, Ray Kurzweil, revisits in a completely secular and futuristic formula the classical myth of immortality. In collaboration with eccentric researchers and generous sponsors, Kurzweil wishes to resurrect his father by “collecting the DNA left in the grave and regenerating his body by using futuristic nanotechnology” (Ford, 2019, p.310). The “singularians” in Kurzweil’s team created their own (unaccredited, of course) university in Silicon Valley, with the help of generous and famous sponsors (Google, Genentech, Cisco, Autodesk). The transhumanists dream of immortality by avoiding death. In what ways? By substantially enriching the performances of the physical body and augmenting their mind with new technologies. They are convinced that there will be hybrid entities of the human-machine, human-robot or human-computer type.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The general tendency of transhumanism is that of making possible the overcoming of our present human condition. We are all aware of the limits of our body and our life. Therefore, we dream of becoming better, healthier and more efficient. Transhumanism works with this human nostalgia and tries to fulfill it with the aid of nanotechnologies and AI. The stake is an innovative biological, mental and social transformation of *homo sapiens* into a posthuman technology-augmented entity.

Obviously, such an attempt at metamorphosing human nature runs big risks, some of which as big as the promises formulated by the fans of transhumanism. There are many experts in human and social sciences (and other sciences, too) who discuss the risks of assuming transhumanism in our lives nowadays. Francis Fukuyama, for instance, wrote (Fukuyama, 2004) about the virtual danger of manipulating the human genetic code. This manipulation would have direct consequences upon the dissolution of the norms of civilized behaviour, the radicalisation of social gaps and the undermining of the values of democracy.

In the global crisis caused by the Covid virus 19, the major risks of the new technologies have also included the consequences of social manipulation with the help of the fifth generation (5S) wireless technology. This would be now “the main stake of the commercial war and the fight for world hegemony between the United States and China” (Lee, Anderson-Lee, 2020, p. 61). The 5S technology would have caused “the oxidation of chains of important hereditary proteins of the inherited immunity system of Wuhan’s population” (Lee, Anderson-Lee, 2020, p. 62). From China, the lethal biological weapon manipulated in a cynical way with the help of 5G technology would have caused the global disasters. In the transhumanists’ view, this compels us to speed up the undertakings of the genetic and mental improvement of the *homo sapiens*.

However, Michio Kaku is convinced that, since the fundamental human needs have remained unchanged, we will continue to wish to look good in the eyes of the others. Therefore, there will be limits and difficulties in the technological and

genetic updating of the contemporary individual. Maybe in a more remote future a *beyond the human being* will be possible, but the human being will always be the essential benchmark of existence.

The camouflaged survival of the old myths in the futuristic scenarios of the enthusiastic advocates of transhumanism are solid arguments in favor of our conviction that the human being will always be visited by the *nostalgia of the absolute* (Mircea Eliade) and by the desire to live a better life in time and history.

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