

## An Incursion into ‘Weak Transhumanism’

Aura-Elena Schussler\*

### Abstract

The acceleration of scientific and technological developments in recent decades has brought both hope and concern for mankind regarding its wellbeing and future existence. In this context, the cultural-philosophical movements of transhumanism, posthumanism and metahumanism have had an important imprint on what currently represents the finding of alternative methods to improve human and non-human living conditions. Thus, the general objective of this paper is to analyze the three aforementioned movements, using Stefan Lorenz Sorgner’s book *On Transhumanism* (2016/2020) as a starting point. In the first part of my study, I will emphasize some of the philosophical theories and approaches that brings transhumanism and posthumanism together in their common path towards the ‘posthuman’, as well as those that separate them. The second part of the paper seeks to highlight the possibility that metahumanism—and especially what Sorgner calls “weak transhumanism”—is a more appropriate approach when considering the various advanced technologies designed to improve human health and lifespan. This perspective also serves to illustrate that any advanced technologies such as bio- and nano-technology, genetic engineering etc. should first of all preserve negative freedom—in terms of achieving a good life, by adopting a pluralistic, naturalistic, non-dualistic and relational understanding of our worldly existence—merged with dynamic adaptation and critical thinking regarding the challenges revealed by these future technologies.

*Keywords:* Transhumanism, Posthumanism, Metahumanism, Weak Transhumanism, Posthuman

### 1. Introduction

Today, the notion of transhumanism has become increasingly widespread, not only in the academic sphere but also in mainstream society. The tendency of some to take the concept of ‘transhumanism’ for granted can lead to a series of misunderstandings regarding not only the concept per se but also what this cultural and philosophical movement represents in the social, scientific, educational, medical, economic and political paradigms by challenging natural and traditional human limitations. The German philosopher Stefan Lorenz Sorgner’s (2016/2020) book *On Transhumanism* is a deep reflection on several topics linked to the theory, which focusses on the different ways in which transhumanism, *via* medical, scientific and technological means such as neuroscience, neuropharmacology and nanotechnology, can change people’s lives in the direction of “radical plurality of the good” (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 84). The main issues addressed by the author are linked to various technologies deemed useful by transhumanism for enhancing biological, psychological or neurological capacities to improve the human condition, as well as to the ultimate goal—that of becoming posthumans. Sorgner discusses genetic enhancements (*via* genetic engineering, e.g., “designer babies”), pharmacological enhancements as cognitive or emotional enhancements (neuroenhancements *via* brain-doping drugs), morphological enhancements (physical enhancement, by means of cosmetic surgery) and cyborg

---

\* Associate Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, 1 Mihail Kogălniceanu Street, 400084, Romania. E-mail: [aura.schussler@ubbcluj.ro](mailto:aura.schussler@ubbcluj.ro), [aurusch2005@yahoo.com](mailto:aurusch2005@yahoo.com); <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6887-9136>

enhancements (e.g., prosthetic legs, as used by the athlete Oscar Pistorius) (Sorgner, 2016/2020). His reflections are not only a critique of the way that transhumanism is achieved in German-speaking countries (rooted in both Christian and Kantian heritage) but also a cartography of the bioliberal English-speaking world, close to evolutionary theory, naturalism and utilitarianism, which represents to some extent the hallmark of transhumanism. In his book, Sorgner also analyses the important role that science and speculative technologies play in transhumanism to further human evolution, powered by the ideal of human self-overcoming. Furthermore, the book raises a series of ethical and political questions (especially targeting the libertarians and left-leaning), such as those related to bioprivacy—who will have access to human genetic information: governments, potential employers, public or private health insurers?—and to a new form of a eugenic policy regarding moral enhancement. There are other considerations, too, regarding future technologies that promise to improve human wellbeing as well as to extend health and lifespans, achieved through various intelligent technologies such as genetic alteration and mind uploading. Beyond these aspects, it is important to understand how the central goals of the transhumanist project, regarding human improvement, are rethought in a critical manner and relocated by Sorgner in the paradigm of ‘weak transhumanism’ (Sorgner, 2016/2020). This process can be understood beyond the simple methodological facet—beyond individualism, radical universalism and linear thinking, specific to the strong version of transhumanism—as a more immanent, relational, rhizomatic and rational reflexive critique of the weak version of transhumanism in terms of achieving a good life. Thus, weak transhumanism—as part of the metahumanist movement and philosophy—embraces a radical hermeneutic, a rational philosophy, an ethical nihilism and a materialist epistemological methodology for understanding the concept of the human, which allows for a fluid and transversal way of understanding human existence as a naturalist and non-dualistic strategy for living in the present. This perspective transforms weak transhumanism, from a thought process to a practice, as far as that it moves in the direction of a dynamic adaptation of embedded and embodied human existence in a common, shared world. It is a form of reconciliation, not only between human and non-human alterities (animals, plants, environment, technology, robots, AI etc.) but also between humans themselves, being at the same time a transformative horizon that allows for moving beyond the instrumentalized reason of the humanistic Enlightenment, as well as that of the relentless human-centric bias.

## **2. Few Considerations on Transhumanism, Posthumanism and Metahumanism**

If the 16th century Copernican Revolution was a period that led to the decentralization of the Earth from the center of the universe, moving beyond the geocentric Ptolemaic system, the 21st century posthuman paradigm is one that decentralizes the traditional way of perceiving the human, moving beyond the humanistic tradition by starting a broader cultural, ideological and scientific revolution. However, regarding the gestation of this posthuman paradigm, the roots of the shift can be easily traced back to the 19th century when Nietzsche heralded the “death of God” (influenced to some extent by Darwin’s evolutionary theory), along with the destabilization of the concept of the “human” as it was shaped by the tradition of Western metaphysics—as a unified dualistic entity (Nietzsche, 1882/2001; 1883/2006). During that time, opponents of this Nietzschean idea had a tendency to view science as, if not the executioner, the means that led to God’s death as well as that of the Christian-platonic humanistic subject. However, today this reserved attitude towards science—weighted previously by the fear of losing the essentialist dialectic of universal humanism, threatened by human emancipation from the auspice of metaphysics and accompanied by a reluctance to the birth of the modern individual (i.e., the Overman as a fragmented entity, subject to becoming by the “will to power”)—has been somewhat overcome. Simultaneously, the contagious science-related

optimism of the Enlightenment—as the *metanarrative* of abstract knowledge and linear progress, viewed as a movement by which knowledge was supposed to be gathered in the name of a universal consensus with regard to the legitimacy of prevailing norms—has also been overcome, with postmodern perspectivism and its incredulity towards *metanarratives* (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Now, science (in the posthuman paradigm of thinking) is neither the enemy nor some form of external transcendental authority, but rather it is the immanent plateau that wants to be accessed in the name of ontological pacifism and hermeneutical affirmative nihilism (where the latter, according to Vatimo (1991; 2012), is viewed as the new ethical option instead of universal moral norms). Thus, this hermeneutical nihilistic paradigm—which coincides with the postmodern experience of overcoming the infallibility of universal valid meanings (Vatimo, 1991; 2012)—should be understood as something that goes beyond a simple mental exercise, embracing a practical and relational schema with regard to the recognition of the existence of a plurality of meanings, and not a lack thereof, in this world humans inhabit. This is also now a process that is challenged by the displacement of the centrality of the human, aspect which is in close connection with the transgression of a series of boundaries situated between the “human” and his “others” (i.e. human/non-human animals, plants, AI, robots, advanced technologies); a paradigm shift that opens up multiple perspectives of co-existence that are moving beyond classical humanism and that represent the birth of new philosophical and cultural movements, those of transhumanism, posthumanism and metahumanism.

In his book *On Transhumanism*, Sorgner (2016/2020) provides a clear introduction for the reader with respect to the “pedigrees” of transhumanism, posthumanism and metahumanism, along with an analysis of the ultimate purpose of transhumanists—that of becoming posthumans. In general terms, ‘posthuman’ is a comprehensive term that relates to the three aforementioned movements. However, Sorgner directs the reader to the fact that the concept of posthuman is understood and described somewhat differently by transhumanism and posthumanism. In addition, for Sorgner, the posthuman is still an open question. For many transhumanists, the posthuman is not yet a crystallized concept, perhaps due to the fact that it is viewed as an aspiration linked to the future that will radically transform the actual human condition. For FM-2030 (1989), the posthuman will be an entirely different entity, altered by means of technology, and which will cease to belong to the human species. Conversely, for James Hughes, the posthuman (at least in its early stages) will not necessarily be an entirely new species resulting from various genetic or cybernetic technological alterations (Hughes, 2004). For him, at first, the line between human and posthuman (even considering the various technological improvements) will be a fluid and flexible one—in order to protect everyone’s negative freedom, depending on how these modified or unmodified individuals perceive themselves: as humans or posthumans (Hughes, 2004). In the same context, for Nick Bostrom, the posthuman is not a new species that may emerge in the future but is an improved yet unknown form of the human and must have a near-future goal that can be achieved by means of various technological enhancements, which will entirely transform the internal and external conditions of human existence (Bostrom, 2008, pp. 107-136). This is why, for him, the ‘transhuman’ represents only a transitory state between the current human condition and the future posthuman one.

In contrast, for posthumanist thinkers such as Francesca Ferrando, the posthuman is understood as a continual process of becoming that may already be advancing if one chooses to embrace a *post-humanist*, *post-anthropocentrist* and *post-dualist* way of existence, which means the deterritorialization of not only the symbolic, cultural, historical and political borders rooted in the notion of the human (as a closed one)—but also those linked to human species supremacy and to the hierarchical reductionist dualistic approach of the epistemes; for example, man-woman, black-white, nature-culture, man-robot etc. (Ferrando, 2019). The posthuman is thus a rhizomatic, fluid and transversal way of being, interconnected in a “nature-culture continuum” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 61) involving human-nonhuman animals and technology; this is why humans

“have always been posthuman” according to Katherine Hayles (1999, p. 279), an argument that is within anthropological parameters and not phylogenetic ones, according to Sorgner (2016/2020, pp. 39-40). Moreover, the posthuman, in Braidotti’s thinking, is a materialist, vitalist and vibrant convergent phenomenon situated between post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism—meant to rethink the theoretical and methodological challenges regarding the instrumentalized separation between *bios* (the human life organized in society) and *zoē* (the self-organizing life of human and non-human entities) (Braidotti, 2013). Thus, Braidotti’s posthuman condition aims to decentralize the metaphysical construction of the human (created in the image and likeness of God), as well as those of the Enlightenment’s “man” of reason (linked to Descartes’ and Kant’s human exceptionalism grounding) and human species supremacy. Her critical posthumanism embraces an ecocriticist, neomaterialist and relational way of defining the posthuman, opposing any transcendental universalism, that is, a heading towards a “radical immanence” exposed by Spinoza’s monistic worldview. This means that the ‘posthuman subject’ is subjected to a continuous becoming, being a fluid, materially embedded and embodied nomadic entity (Braidotti, 2013). However, both transhumanism and posthumanism share more similarities than differences, such as the non-dualistic anthropological understanding of the human (centered on recognition rather than assimilation)—which moves away from the traditional dualistic anthropology and ontology of the Enlightenment—as well as that of the symbiotic structure of existence, which involves various systems and networks within which the biological and the artificial (technological) merge. Moreover, in the Nietzschean paradigm of thinking rooted in both movements, the human has no fixed structure because human nature has always been under the auspices of the *will to power*, which renders it in a continual process of becoming, that is to say, a “work-in-progress”, according to Nick Bostrom (2003).

Withal, transhumanism is not just a single movement or approach to thinking: it includes several currents with similar ideologies but that are influenced by different philosophical, scientific or political theories, such as libertarian transhumanism (Max More and the *Extropy Institute* or Zoltan Istvan, the founder of *U.S. Transhumanist Party*, in 2014), democratic transhumanism (represented by James Hughes) and singularity (involving the well-known futurist Ray Kurzweil and his theory on mind uploading, making him a silicon-based transhumanist), among others. These various movements and ideologies share various goals and principles, such as the prolongation of life through biotechnological means, extropianism, morphological freedom or self-enhancement. Similarly, no posthumanism is not a single movement either or singly school of thought but it is many, diverse, and multi-faceted, especially in the academic field wherein philosophical posthumanism is discussed, a theory related to the “radical deconstruction” of the “human as a fixed notion” (Ferrando, 2019, p. 113), a position that criticizes not only the continental anthropocentric bias but also the dualistic hierarchical and essentialist heritage of the binary oppositions of the metaphysics of presence discourse. This philosophical posthumanism is completed by other well-known posthuman theories, those of critical and cultural posthumanism, which, alongside philosophical posthumanism, have their roots in deconstructivism, poststructuralism, critical feminism and cultural studies, associated with names such as Rosi Braidotti and Katherine Hayles, for whom the posthuman project is a “nomadic” and “cyborgic” one (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999).

Metahumanism, for Sorgner, integrates central elements from both aforementioned movements (such as enhancement technologies and a critique of the onto-metaphysical humanistic tradition), functioning as a binder between transhumanism and posthumanism and being the cultural movement founded by Sorgner and Jaime del Val in 2010 (Sorgner & Del Val, 2011). However, while Sorgner seeks to find a balance between the two movements, Del Val appears more critical of transhumanism, especially of strong transhumanism, questioning the hyper-humanism agenda and that of radical extension of life, which both rely for him on “quantitative enhancements” rather than on “qualitative transformations” of human existence

(Del Val, 2020). This makes Del Val closer to critical posthumanism theories and to Deleuze's and Guattari's legacy, embracing immanentism, nomadism, vitalism and Braidotti's relational ontology of becoming. Sorgner, however, is closer to Vatimo's 'weak thinking', Nietzsche's perspectivism and Spinoza's naturalistic anthropology—by which he tries to blur the rationalist enlightenment tradition and the Cartesian humanistic standpoint by questioning the ontological boundaries between species, minds-bodies and technologies—where metahumans “refer to human beings as worldly, non-dualistic, and relational” entities (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 41). Thus, the metahuman (for metahumanists) as well as the posthuman (for posthumanists) is not a futuristic individual but an open-ended way of becoming in the present, *via* the various plateaus and stratifications provided by technology, art, medicine and the environment, which make humans constantly engage in various networks of embodied relationality. For Jaime del Val, it is a movement and a praxis that opens up a multi-layered, “amorphous” and rhizomatic existence—a “body without organs,” in Deleuzian terms, which experiences endless events to acquire plurality, hybridity and “amorphogenesis” (Del Val, 2020). For instance, as we may identify in Del Val's metaformances, the “metabody” of the metahuman is nothing more than the area of *pure intensity* or *pure immanence* wherein the body is liberated from the cultural-symbolic and paternalistic orders of the instrumentalized Self by following the *lines of flight of deterritorialization*, experimenting with and unleashing the boundaries of non-dualistic human existence and dissolving the subject-object distinction and agency (Del Val, 2020; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2005).

But, even if these three cultural movements share an overall similar line of thinking—in their movement beyond the traditional humanistic anthropology—by embracing Nietzsche's non-dualist philosophy (that of the Overhuman and the naturalistic anthropology of the Spinozist non-dualism), their genealogies differ, asserts Sorgner. If posthumanism is a result of postmodern philosophical movements—such as feminism, postcolonialism, critical race theory and cultural theories associated with names such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida, adopting a materialist anthropological perspective concerning human-technology interaction—transhumanism is the result of English tradition (associated with Darwin's evolution theory or Mill's utilitarianism), grounded in the Anglo-American bioethical tradition and characterized by a liberal-democratic attitude towards human freedom and equality regarding the use of technology to amplify human abilities (Sorgner, 2016/2020). Nevertheless, transhumanism is not totally removed from postmodern philosophy either. In transhumanism, certain postmodern influences such as critical thinking, the recognition of human in its multiples identities and the continuous interrogation of human knowledge can be found. Beyond the convergences, as expected, different roots or “pedigrees” have led to certain ideological divergences between transhumanists and posthumanists (Sorgner, 2016/2020). For instance, posthumanist thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti (2013), Cary Wolfe (2010) and Francesca Ferrando (2019) view transhumanism as anthropocentric, a shadow of the Renaissance and Enlightenment humanism. Their opinion is reinforced not only by the arguments of Julian Huxley, the pioneer of transhumanism, for whom transhumanism means “...man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature” (Huxley, 1957, p. 17), but also by Fuller (Fuller & Lipińska, 2014), Hughes (2010, pp. 622-640) and Bostrom's (2005) analysis from which transhumanism is revealed as the continuation of Enlightenment tradition, cherishing progress, reason and science in its humanistic concern regarding human self-overcoming in favor of a future hyper-humanism. What Braidotti, Wolfe and Ferrando emphasize is that the Enlightenment notions of humanity, progress, reason and science have been taken for granted by many transhumanists, preserving anthropocentric legacy and human exceptionalism, in which human qualities and essences are distinguished and somewhat superior in comparison to those of other living entities. For instance, transhumanists such as Fuller view humans as a privileged species by “...virtue of our capacity to understand the entire evolutionary

process” (Fuller & Lipińska, 2014, p. 6). This is another viewpoint criticized by Braidotti and Ferrando because such a position, in their opinion (regarding the concept of human), is outside any non-essentialist critical thinking, which consequently short-circuits the deconstruction of the onto-epistemological primacy of the human and its accessing of the frames of perspectivism and a pluralistic understanding of meanings (as critical posthumanism does). In this context, as a mediation form of critical thought, metahumanism tries to solve this divergence issues stressed by transhumanism and posthumanism. Metahumanism, is borrowing from posthumanism, an immanent version of relationism and pluralism merged with perspectivism, viewed by Sorgner as the “proper epistemic position” regarding human-technology interaction (Sorgner & Del Val, 2011). This is why metahumanism for him is rather a “weak” version of posthumanism (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 41). Moreover, in contrast to strong transhumanism’s universally valid norms characterized by technological optimism, strong technological determinism and the utopianism of silicon-based transhumanist—regarding an indefinite lifespan in a post-genetic Era, where humans will evolve from a carbon-based existence to a silicon embodiment (Fuller & Lipińska, 2014; Kurzweil, 2005)—metahumanism claims that enhancement techniques should preserve naturalistic anthropology when is about human alterations. However, from transhumanism, metahumanism embraces the principles of negative freedom and critical rationalism, principles that in the metahumanist paradigm of thinking refer to the flourishing of all persons (and persons also include non-human entities, animals and potentially also embodies AI’s) in a non-dualistic and hybrid way of existence. Thus, metahumanism cherishes the “great plurality of idiosyncratic lifestyles” beginning now and emerges as the “weak” version of transhumanism (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 41; Sorgner, 2014, pp. 29-49). Therefore, Metahumanism is rather a philosophical convergence, which supports an emergent ontology of becoming, a fluid and open set of forces, grounded on affects and a radical relationism merged with Nietzsche’s perspectivism and Vattimo’s (1988/1991) radical hermeneutics.

### **3. Why Choose ‘Weak Transhumanism’?**

In a broader sense, transhumanism seeks to enhance the human condition by means of science and advanced technologies. Unfortunately, in mainstream society, various utopian and dystopian scenarios regarding new technologies emerge, in which humans will either live forever (and where death, in a dystopian paradigm, will represent the new desideratum) or be destroyed by super-intelligent AI or robots. However, things are far of being so childish. In its instrumentalist paradigm, technology was used as a tool for improving human life from the very beginning of humankind—from the first sticks and stones that helped archaic humans gather food, hunt or avoid predators. Today, people are surrounded by various technologies such as electricity, transportation, antibiotics, vaccines, smartphones, smart TVs, computers and AI, meaning that they are connected to technology and they evolve with and because of it. Nevertheless, for transhumanists this evolution cannot be conceived outside of progress (be it linear, or exponential, as Kurzweil (2005) predicts). This is why transhumanism understands the transformation of the human condition as a result of the development of various advanced technologies and their being available to humans, in their best interests, enhancing human intellectual, physical, neurological and psychological capacities. This will lead, in their opinion, to an extended healthy lifespan by ending the aging process and eradicating deadly or neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinsons or spinal muscular atrophy (More, 2013a, pp. 3-18). As a philosophy, transhumanism has its roots in the Enlightenment humanism, moving away in the same time from Descartes’ Cartesian foundationalism and Enlightenment idealism by embracing a secular worldview and a strong critical rationalism, materialism and functionalism. However, Sorgner’s weak transhumanism is adopting a more “naturalist understanding of human beings” (Sorgner, 2014, p. 42). This naturalistic approach regarding



embodied and embrained human existence is understood within the paradigm of the evolutionary process—a position that is twisting the enlightenment anthropology without completely overcoming it (Sorgner, 2021, pp. 53-66). For Max More, “transhumanism is a life philosophy” (More, 2013a, p. 4), defined by the “principles of extropy”—the “principles of perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, open society, self-direction, and rational thinking” (More, 2013a, pp. 3-18)—which move away from the old “precautionary principle” towards a more pragmatic one: the “proactionary principle” (More, 2013b, pp. 258-268). The need to leave behind these precautionary norms, in More’s view, is due to these principles being built around a narrow safeguard and caution values (to eliminate any risks that science and technology may involve), aspects that short-circuit and slow down progress (More, 2013b, pp. 258-268). Embracing a proactionary attitude does not mean, for him, the ignoring of all risks but the understanding that “avoiding all risks is not possible” (More, 2013b, p. 265). Such an objective line of thought attracts, according to More (2013b), the adoption of wise, balanced decision-making, being aware of the permanent presence of any potential risks that technological progress can bring, without minimizing its benefits as a consequence of these risks. Even though these principles are embraced by the majority of transhumanists, they are not rejected by most bio-conservative sceptics. This is because, for them, the principles appear too radical in their goals regarding the full realization of human potential (i.e., hyper-humanism) in the name of progress, an aspect that threatens nature determinism and human essentialism. This may be why Francis Fukuyama called transhumanism “the most dangerous idea in the world” (Fukuyama, 2004). His reluctance regarding certain technological advances can also be deduced from his view of bio- and nanotechnology products and genetic engineering as “dangerous” and “nuclear weapons” (Fukuyama, 2002, p. 8). He claims that transhumanists will “deface humanity with their genetic bulldozers and psychotropic shopping malls” (Fukuyama, 2004). This is indeed a very apocalyptic argument that, in Sorgner’s opinion, is the result of the traditional paternalistic, essentialist and dualistic ontology of thinking, characteristic of many bio-conservatives. This is why Sorgner (2016/2020) opens his work *On Transhumanism* with a critique on Fukuyama’s position, suggesting that transhumanism in itself is not a dangerous idea, but that danger can occur from the way some transhumanist ideas and goals may be misapplied by certain malicious minds and politics. As a metahumanist, Sorgner is critical not only of bio-conservative judgments but also of strong transhumanism. This does not mean, however, that his philosophy is to completely reject the proactionary principle, only that he distances himself from Fuller’s hyper-humanism universal ideals and proactionary agenda—which both go against any naturalistic anthropology position by pushing human nature to ultimately abandon its carbon substratum (Fuller, 2014). Sorgner’s transhumanist critical stance towards Fuller’s (2014) and Kurzweil’s (2005) silicon-based transhumanism engagements—with respect to breaking free from biological evolution altogether by uploading the mind into “silicon incarnations” (Fuller, 2014, p. 49; Sorgner, 2021)—is grounded in the limits of non-dualism. This is why he is critical of a property-dualism grounding, in terms of whole-brain emulation, which although finds favorable answers in the physicalist and functionalist paradigm, raises unknowns in terms of a possible embedded existence in a silicone environment. Beyond these aspects however, Sorgner sympathizes with the proactionary paradigm regarding freedom in general—where freedom is portrayed, in contrast with any *a priori* grounding or transcendental idealism; namely as a “means” for the progress of human nature and not as an “end in itself” (Fuller, 2014, p. 37). Furthermore, Sorgner’s weak transhumanism is situated in the naturalistic, non-dualistic, secular, relational and immanent understanding of the human. Influenced by Vattimo’s weak thinking (2012, pp. 39-53), Sorgner’s weak transhumanism is not ‘weak’ in the sense that it is unable to support, explain or accept the importance of science and advanced technologies, but rather because it emphasizes that science and advanced technologies must be acknowledged in a contextually oriented paradigm, by moving them from the global understanding to the “glocal”

one, in a world of knowledge shaped by contrasts and a dynamic complementarity of different approaches. Furthermore, weak transhumanism is weak because of the lack of the absolutization of science, technology, progress and human enhancements. This is to guide humans to embrace pluralism and perspectivism and become aware of their continuous movement into relationality within the various horizons of worldly challenges linked to technology. It is an approach that lies between the strong response of hyper-humanism and the onto-epistemological syncretic reconciliation of existence pertaining to critical posthumanism. For Sorgner, the goal of enhancements in weak transhumanist thinking should be viewed as both a clear way of achieving negative freedom to extend healthy lifespan and a rational, critical and creative way of using science and technology, to identify the most effective ways to reduce technological and biotechnological risks regarding human and nonhuman life, along with the acceleration of these technologies' benefits according to personal human values and wellbeing. This is also to emphasize that any new technological enhancements attract both benefits and risks, which should not cause alarm or lamentation, as Fukuyama (2004) supports—by emphasizing the threatening of egalitarian ideals of democracy by the alteration of human nature essence by means of genetic engineering—but reveal multiple perspectives from which people have access to an improved life. However, Fukuyama's position is in close connection with the Gattaca Argument, which introduces the genetic discrimination scenario based on a new type of “Nazi eugenics,” which will lead to two types of society: one that belongs to the genetically enhanced, modified individuals and another that belongs to the unenhanced (Fukuyama, 2002). Thus, one of bio-conservative's concerns is whether those who are genetically selected will indeed be considered superior and will have certain rights and privileges that the unmodified do not—as is portrayed in Andrew Niccol's film *Gattaca*, (Niccol, 1997). This is essentially an open question, but for bio-conservatives such as Habermas or Fukuyama, it is clear that the necro-political empowerment of eugenics—in which certain individuals (the unmodified) will be condemned to a slow death (be it social, civil or physical) as a consequence of discrimination—will be the dominant approach in transhumanist's goals towards the posthuman stage. Even so, looking more closely at the policies of today's societies, it can be easily identified that a form of division between actual societies exists on two levels. More precisely, it can be understood how some current medical services and products (vaccines, antibiotics, transplants etc.), which can be said to already represent a means of improving and prolonging life, are largely accessible to white/western people and, in certain situations, to those with at least an adequate financial status. Therefore, before the bio-conservative anxiety regarding the possible discriminatory risks that technology may bring in the future is taken for granted, it would be wiser to reflect first on some of the discriminatory problems that are already being faced. Thus, although Gattaca society appears utopian—projecting a world in which diseases and suffering will be almost completely eradicated—Sorgner views genetic alterations as unlikely to lead to technological totalitarianism or a two-tiered society based on genetic discrimination (as bio-conservatives assert) if a weak transhumanist thinking is adopted (Sorgner, 2017, pp. 133-172). Beyond this assumption, as a weak transhumanist, Sorgner is aware that a particular libertarian type of transhumanism (the strong version) may lead to some form of discrimination—a consequence of radical technological optimism, hyper-humanism and poor ideological attachment to equality and solidarity. Additionally, the liberal social democratic approach of transhumanism, supported by Hughes (2004), is also risky regarding the short-circuiting of negative freedom, but is more committed to equality and solidarity regarding technological liberation. This is why Sorgner proposes a weak transhumanist approach to this issue, wherein a “dynamic adaptation” is required, a pragmatic movement in between these political insights and “a fluid interplay between negative freedom and equality or between a libertarian and a social democratic system” (Sorgner, 2017, p. 54). Thus, even though Fukuyama views the biotechnological project of transhumanism as pushing society towards a techno-totalitarianism, as in Aldous Huxley's *Brave*



*New World* (1932/2014)—something that may happen if the libertarian transhumanism agenda regarding a strong regulation of enhancement technology is realized—it is a scenario that can be prevented if a weak transhumanist approach is put into practice. This does not entail banning all biotechnologies for the sake of safety but constantly revising and improving them and then ensuring these are at the disposal of each individual, preserving negative and morphological freedom. Following a utilitarian understanding of human rights regarding their own bodies, morphological freedom will give people the right to modify their bodies at will (Sandberg, 2013, pp. 56-64). This is why weak transhumanism supports a continual redefinition of values, goals, interests, opinions, technologies and enhancements, constantly creating a more dynamic and fluid understanding of worldly human challenges. Consequently, both techno-totalitarianism and a two-class society (based on genetic discrimination) can be avoided by having judicious government regulation and building a proper democratic system, protecting diversity, plurality, equality, freedom of critical thinking and the right to negative freedom. Sorgner critiques both Jürgen Habermas’ bio-conservative position on liberal eugenics and the philosophical German idealism tradition, which is opposed to the postmodern understanding of the anthropology of rationality. Beyond the fact that Habermas deems transhumanists as “crazy intellectuals” (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 57), he rejects transhumanist goals with regard to genetic enhancements. For him, human bioenhancements are morally suitable for therapeutic purposes only and not for enhancement (Sorgner, 2016/2020, p. 37). Habermas’ bio-conservative and paternalistic position is obvious and so is Fukuyama’s, considering that therapy for both aims to remedy something that does not work within “normal” parameters and enhancement aims to improve something beyond the healthy state of an organism, which in their vision means an alteration of the “natural” state of that organism (Fukuyama, 2002; Habermas, 2001/2003). In this paradigm, differences of opinion are constructed around the topic of moral incompatibility of education and parent-determined genetic modifications, something claimed by Habermas. Supporting Bostrom’s arguments, in favor of child genetic enhancement, Sorgner asserts that there is no such incompatibility because both are a type of enhancement. Thus, the alteration of genetic makeup and traditional education, for Sorgner, should not be perceived as antagonistic but rather as convergent, for the reasons that both procedures are built on parental decisions regarding a child’s wellbeing and development during a phase in which the child has not the discernment to decide for themselves and both practices are as well reversible and irreversible (Sorgner, 2016/2020; 2015, pp. 31-48). In these terms, both classical education and genetic enhancement are linked to Nietzsche’s overhuman paradigm of thinking, even if for Nietzsche education plays a central role in human self-overcoming, an aspect that does not exclude, in Sorgner’s view, genetic enhancements. In the same context, bioliberal thinkers such as Julian Savulescu support the notion that therapy and enhancements should not be viewed as incompatible because people should have the liberty to choose technologies and other tools (such as bioenhancements and genetic engineering) to improve their lives for their own interests (Savulescu, Sandberg & Kahane, 2011, pp. 3-19). Although Sorgner agrees with many of Savulescu’s theories connected to genetic engineering, he disagrees with Savulescu’s Renaissance paternalistic ideals with regard to direct moral enhancement—viewed in terms of a common-sense ideal of morality as a universally valid concept of the good—because such a position, according to Sorgner, goes against the radical non-universal plurality of the good, found at the core of his weak transhumanism (Sorgner, 2016/2020). Savulescu’s position is problematic because he is claiming that various biomedical means, such as genetic manipulation, should be plausibly and morally mandatory for enhancing moral dispositions (i.e., altruism or the sense of justice) in a not-so distant future, in 2045 when the “Great Moral Project will be completed” (Savulescu & Persson, 2012, p. 409). Another proposal made by Savulescu and Persson is the voluntary (and in some cases non-voluntary) connection of people to the so-called *God Machine*, a powerful bioquantum computer that will “monitor the thoughts, beliefs, desires and intentions of every human being”

(Savulescu & Persson, 2012, p. 409). In my opinion, this futuristic scenario is nothing more than the projection of a new techno-totalitarian regime or, better said, the birth of a techno-panopticon surveillance. It may also be viewed as a type of “singleton” whose role is to create a valid universal moral system. As Bostrom claims, “One could also imagine a singleton arising from the universal spread of a singleton self-enforcing moral code.” (Bostrom, 2006, p. 49). Similarly, for Savulescu, this God Machine is not a moral enhancement but rather a way to calibrate human moral behaviors. Thus, both Bostrom’s singleton and Savulescu’s God Machine are in close connection with the scenarios developed in *Brave New World* and *Gattaca*, sharing the same values and hopes regarding a common moral code for people’s “happiness,” aided by different drugs or genetic alterations. Even if Bostrom and Savulescu are more positive about future technological developments, their scenarios are reminiscent of paternalistic values concerning human wellbeing. To avoid this totalitarian and paternalistic project, a weak transhumanist thinking is preferred—where, according to Sorgner, a Nietzschean-fictional-liberal approach to achieving moral enhancement, merged with Vattimo’s affirmative hermeneutical nihilism, is preferred; this claims that a cognitive enhancement combined with a flexible thinking or interpretation (as a transformative practice of freedom) is more plausible because it can indirectly enhance morality and protect plurality and thus be outside both the singleton universal moral project and the God Machine. In this order of ideas, weak transhumanism seems to embrace a fluid approach to current and future human existence, but also a critique of the “hard” aspects of strong transhumanism and bio-liberalism, libertarianism and traditional bio-conservative paternalism—aspects that transforms it as an affirmative approach to a this worldly understanding of existence.

#### 4. Conclusions

The paradigm shifts that transhumanism, posthumanism and metahumanism are bringing into current cultural, philosophical, political and biomedical challenges represent more than a simple theoretical or ideological enquiry regarding human essence. This is because the three aforementioned movements try to go beyond and in between humanistic legacy, by bringing to light true human potential, as entities who are constantly subjected to the process of becoming in a bio-techno/nature–culture symbiotic web. In this context, Sorgner’s weak transhumanism adheres to Nietzsche’s perspectivism and immanentism, but also goes beyond Gianni Vattimo’s weak thinking, embracing a fusion of theory and practices, ethical nihilism and multi-perspective relationalities. Through this, Sorgner presents transhumanism in a new light, in that of the metahumanities, going beyond both strong transhumanism and the narrow vision of some bio-conservatives—for whom transhumanism is one “of the most dangerous idea in the world”. His metahumanist perspective is one in which different enhancement techniques, and their self-transformative potential to improve human life, are not deemed as a threat to mankind in terms of altering its carbon-based existence but, by embracing a critical thinking and critical selection, as new chances that can enrich human co-existence, with these future technologies, in an open and shared world.

#### References

- Bostrom, N. (2003). Transhumanist Values. In Adams F. (Ed.), *Ethical Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. *Philosophical Documentation Center Press*. <https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/values.html>
- Bostrom, N. (2005). A History of Transhumanist Thought. *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 14(1), 1–25. <https://nickbostrom.com/papers/history.pdf>
- Bostrom, N. (2006). What is a Singleton? *Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations*, 5(2), 48–54. <http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/singleton.pdf>

- Bostrom, N. (2008). Why I Want to be a Posthuman When I Grow Up. In Gordijn B. & Chadwick R. (Eds.) *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity. The International Library of Ethics, Law and Technology*, (Vol. 2) (pp. 107–136). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8852-0\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8852-0_8)
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The Posthuman*. Polity Press.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2005). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1987).
- Del Val, J. (2020). *Metahumanist Manifesto: Its genealogy, evolution and relevance 10 years after*. 1–9. Online: <https://metabody.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/METAHUMANIST-MANIFESTO-INTRODUCTION-Jaime-del-Val-1-1-1-final-web.pdf>
- Ferrando, F. (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury.
- FM-2030. (1989). *Are You a Transhuman?* Warner Books.
- Fukuyama, F. (2002). *Our Posthuman Future*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Fukuyama, F. (2004, September/October). The World's Most Dangerous Ideas: Transhumanism. *Foreign Policy*, 144, 42–43.
- Fuller, S. & Lipińska, V. (2014). *The Proactionary Imperative. A Foundation for Transhumanism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Habermas, J. (2003). *The Future of Human Nature*. (W. Rehg, M. Pensky & H. Beister, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 2001).
- Hayles, K. (1999). *How we Became Posthuman*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hughes, J. (2004). *Citizen Cyborg*. Westview Press.
- Hughes, J. (2010). Contradictions from the Enlightenment Roots of Transhumanism. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 35(6), 622–640. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhq049>.
- Huxley, A. (2014). *Brave New World*. (3rd ed.). Vintage Classics. (Original work published 1932).
- Huxley, J. (1957). *New Bottles for New Wine*. Chatto & Windus.
- Kurzweil, R. (2005). *The Singularity is Near*. Viking Penguin.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Manchester University Press. (Original work published 1979).
- More, M. (2013a). The Philosophy of Transhumanism. In M. More & N. V. More (Eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader. Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (pp. 3–18). Wiley-Blackwell.
- More, M. (2013b). The Proactionary Principle: Optimizing Technological Outcomes. In M. More & N. V. More (Eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader. Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (pp. 258–268). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Niccol, A. (Director/Writer). (1997). *Gattaca* [Film]. Columbia Pictures Jersey Films.
- Nietzsche, F. (2001). *The Gay Science*. (1st ed.) (B. Williams, Ed.). (J. Nauckhoff & A. del Caro, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1882).
- Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. A. del Caro & R. B. Pippin. (Eds.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1883).
- Sandberg, A. (2013). Morphological Freedom—Why We Not Just Want It, but Need It. In M. More & N. V. More (Eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader. Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (pp. 56–64). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Savulescu, J., & Persson, I. (2012). Moral Enhancement, Freedom, and the God Machine. *The Monist* 95(3), 399–421. <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist201295321>.
- Savulescu, J., Sandberg, A. & Kahane, G. (2011). Well-Being and Enhancement. In J. Savulescu, M. Ruud & G. Kahane (Eds.), *Enhancing Human Capacities* (pp. 3–19). Blackwell Publishing.
- Sorgner, S. L., & Del Val, J. (2011). Interview with Yunus Tuncel on the Metahumanist Manifesto. *The Agonist, A Nietzsche Circle Journal*, 4(2), 1–14. [http://www.nietzschecircle.com/AGONIST/2011\\_08/Interview\\_Sorgner\\_Stefan-Jaime.pdf](http://www.nietzschecircle.com/AGONIST/2011_08/Interview_Sorgner_Stefan-Jaime.pdf)
- Sorgner, S. L. (2014). Pedigrees. In R. Ranisch & S. L. Sorgner (Eds.), *Post- and Transhumanism. An Introduction* (pp. 29–49). Peter Lang.
- Sorgner, S. L. (2015). The Future of Education: Genetic Enhancement and Metahumanities. *Journal of Evolution and Technology*. 25(1), 31–48. <https://jetpress.org/v25.1/sorgner.pdf>.
- Sorgner, S. L. (2017). Zarathustra 2.0 and Beyond: Further Remarks on the Complex Relationship between Nietzsche and Transhumanism. In S. L. Sorgner & Y. Tuncel (Eds.), *Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Precursor or Enemy?* (pp. 133–172). Cambridge Scholars.
- Sorgner, S. L. (2020). *On Transhumanism: The Most Dangerous Idea in the World?!* (S. Hawkins, Trans.). Pennsylvania State University Press. (Original work published 2016).
- Sorgner, S. L. (2021). Transhumanism. In M. R. Thomsen & J. Wamberg (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Posthumanism* (pp. 53–66). Bloomsbury.

- Vattimo, G. (1991). *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*. (J. R. Snyder, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 1988).
- Vattimo, G. (2012). Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought. In G. Vattimo & P. A. Rogatti (Eds.), *Weak Thought* (pp. 39-53). Suny Press.
- Wolfe, C. (2010). *What is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press.