

Transhumanism: projections of opportunities, risks and dangers

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The experience of recent decades reveals a special changeability of various aspects of human existence. The nomadic movement in space «trans» is especially typical. Modern philosophical thought for these processes uses the term «transhumanism». The paper considers scientifically oriented outlook of transhumanism, analyzes the opportunities, risks and dangers of biotechnological transformation of human into posthuman.

Key words: human, transhumanism, posthumanity, bodycentrism

I. Introduction

The current situation the humanity is in is characterized as a crisis which has catastrophic features. Natural and social levels of crisis lead up to its deepest level – anthropological, the roots of which are in the processes concerning person. The modern worlds experience gives a new image of a man who can not be the subject of European classical humanities. With the rapid development of information, nano- and biotechnologies that involve man in dangerous space of anthropological limits, there is a need for new concepts of human knowledge, a new approach to the phenomenon of man. It comes to the person in perspective of transhumanism. Transhumanism is one of the trends in posthumanism. Posthumanism indicates the general direction in philosophy, according to which the position of classical humanism of the Renaissance, including the definition of the person, are outdated, not adequate in the current situation. Some of the modern schools of philosophy, basing on the technological development of modern society, recognize the chance of human's autoevolutional development into posthuman. Transhumanism is a rational outlook, which basing on the achievements and prospects of modern science and new technologies, recognizes the possibility and desirability of a fundamental changes in the position of a person, a significant strengthening of the physical, intellectual and psychological capabilities and ultimately eliminating of diseases, aging and death [1].

II. History of transhumanism

For the first time the word «transhumane» was used by Dante Alighieri in his «Divine Comedy». The modern meaning of the term was acquired in the mid-twentieth century, when the famous biologist Julian Huxley in his book «New bottles for new wine» called transhumanist to be a man who is busy with self-improvement [2]. One of the first definitions of transhumanism as a philosophy was introduced by philosopher Max More, founder of the

Institute of Ekstropizm and author of ekstropizm principles [3] and in 1997, philosophers Nick Bostrom and David Pearce founded the World Transhumanist Association (WTA) [4]. Now transhumanism is an outlook and a lifestyle, a philosophy and a broad international social movement. The Transhumanist Declaration:

1) Humanity will be radically changed by technology in the future. We foresee the feasibility of redesigning the human condition, including such parameters as the inevitability of aging, limitations on human and artificial intellects, unchosen psychology, suffering, and our confinement to the planet earth.

2) Systematic research should be put into understanding these coming developments and their long-term consequences.

3) Transhumanists think that by being generally open and embracing of new technology we have a better chance of turning it to our advantage than if we try to ban or prohibit it.

4) Transhumanists advocate the moral right for those who so wish to use technology to extend their mental and physical (including reproductive) capacities and to improve their control over their own lives. We seek personal growth beyond our current biological limitations.

5) In planning for the future, it is mandatory to take into account the prospect of dramatic progress in technological capabilities. It would be tragic if the potential benefits failed to materialize because of technophobia and unnecessary prohibitions. On the other hand, it would also be tragic if intelligent life went extinct because of some disaster or war involving advanced technologies.

6) Transhumanism advocates the well-being of all sentience (whether in artificial intellects, humans, posthumans, or non-human animals) and encompasses many principles of modern humanism. Transhumanism does not support any particular party, politician or political platform [5].

According to transhumanists, technical progress, which is continuously accelerating, as early as 2050 will provide an opportunity to create posthuman, whose skills are fundamentally different from the abilities of modern humans. Especially genetic engineering, molecular nanotechnology, creating neural prostheses and direct interfaces «computer brain» will help to advance in this direction. Researchers of the phenomenon of transhumanism, including Russian scientist V. Maslov, talk about the four main stages of the transition from human to posthuman;

1) Biological, it is aimed at the revealing and using of the human genetic code;

2) cyborgical, the aim of which is combination of man and machine;

3) informational, the main feature of which is the so-called «downloading» - the transfer of human consciousness and the biological body into the computer;

4) virtual reality.

III. Opportunities of transhumanism

Transhumanism as theorists believe it is based on the same positions as humanism, including respect for reason and science, a tendency to progress, the recognition of the dignity of human life. The peculiarity of transhumanism is the recognition and anticipation of radical changes in

the nature and possibilities of our lives, which are the results of the various scientific and technological innovations. The main goal of transhumanism is infinite perfection of man using all possible methods for this purpose, that is why they support the development of new technologies, among which nanotechnology is believed to be the most promising, biotechnology, information technologies, projects in the field of artificial intelligence, cryonics. At first glance, these ideas seem to be the fruit of imagination of science fiction writers, but current realities suggest that humanity is actively moving towards era of «posthuman». The following can be cited as evidence:

1) the appearance of man in the world becomes multivariate (having children «in vitro», surrogacy, donorship);

2) cryotechnology makes it possible to store germ cells of dead people and contribute to their biological children;

3) human physicality being becomes multivariate (the latest advances in plastic surgery, transplantation, prosthetics give reason to believe that the body can't be considered to be one of the criteria of human identity and became «suit», «packaging», which can be manipulated;

4) cellular engineering and cloning invented by it create conditions for growing «spare parts» of man, and thereby removing the problem of the human body wearing out and aging;

5) deciphering of the human genome and the discovery of genetic mechanisms allow to stop operation of any genes.

IV. Risks of transhumanism

But transhumanism includes not only the potential benefits but also the risks associated with new technologies. They predict that humanity could eventually become a technical person - posthuman. First of all this is connected to the fact that much of the trends and concepts in transhumanism are grounded on the ideological level by principles of technocentrism and scientism. On this basis we can observe retreat from issues of social justice, the reform of human institutions and other landmarks of Enlightenment humanism. By contrast narcissistic desire to go beyond the human body in search of more sophisticated forms of life are enhancing. Egomaniac, selfishness of human body darken the prospects opened up by the introduction of new scientific technological advances in human life. Thus, humanism is replaced by bodycentrism - the cult of the body. Body, due to the numerous medical procedures with it, turns into a so-called simulacrum. From this point of view, transhumanism in such manifestations is the rejection of the ideals of humanism and rejection of pristine triune nature of man - spirit, soul and body (No Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because you can not make a single hair white or black. From Matt., 5:36). In fact, excessive attention to the body is provoked not to save it, but for further processing, transformation. As a result, there are manipulations with the organs, they are detached from the whole. This trend is actively cultivated, particularly in the media and computer networks. Often we meet the interlocutor whose opinion does not even have a minimum personal color, it is a person with the ever-changing identities, or «virtual identity», who is not personally identified, manipulated, passively going

with the flow and hedonistic fashion, willing to change bodily indefinitely for the bodily pleasures and bodily self-fulfillment. Such quirks is a realization in modern culture risks, connected with a particular interpretation of the general principles of transhumanism.

V. Dangers of transhumanism

As we can see, one can not deny that the ideas of transhumanism are permeated with positive intentions and aim to change the lives of the individual and humanity for the better, but at a closer look, there are some very important ethical issues. Here are some of them:

1) What happens to the concept of fatherhood and who will be responsible for the biological and psychological characteristics of «artificially bred» children;

2) whether the idea of «raising» children «on request» does not transfer the problem of childbearing into consumer area where the child becomes a «commodity» that meets the needs of a «buyer»;

3) whether the concept of a «perfect man» has a right to exist;

4) whether the change the genetic constitution of man would not to change his moral, spiritual identity;

5) whether the possibility of intervention in the human genome would not make ground for criminal manipulations;

6) whether the latest technologies will be accessible for people of different income level;

7) whether the legal framework for «transhumans» is needed, etc.

Conclusion

Let us conclude. Ignoring these problems, related to transhumanic movement can lead to negative consequences in human development and even the disappearance of the human species. The main danger of technological quirks of transhumanism is defined by our understanding of how important human nature as a source of values is. Limitless optimism of transhumanic movement may cause modern human to lose the sense of line between the obvious advantages and insinuating evil.

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