



OPENING THE DEBATE

The Crisis of Humanism and Emerging Post-Anthropocentric Epoch: A Personalistic View

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ABSTRACT

The present article is devoted to a discussion of the crisis of humanism and prospects for a post-anthropocentric society. The evolution of humanism is traced as a broad cultural phenomenon that affects all spheres of society. The author sets out to show that the crisis of humanism is associated not only with philosophical criticism from the perspectives of trans- and post-humanism, but also with the prospects for a society in which humanistic ideas about a person as a bodily- and mentally-autonomous being continue to predominate. In this regard, various ethical and philosophical concepts are considered that seemingly point to the inevitability of going beyond the limits of anthropocentrism. However, one particular problem that emerges is either ignored by many authors or remains to be properly resolved. This problem is associated with the prospect of losing the capability of “metamorphosis” due to the latest human technologies for universal communication (empathy and understanding) along with the destruction of the fragile global “lifeworld”. The destruction of this lifeworld is fraught with alienation and the multiplication of planetary risks. The author proposes that the problem of unpredictability and the danger of manmade interventions in human nature can best be approached by considering the hypothetical posthuman in close relationship with the social whole. This philosophical “optics” can be borrowed from the philosophy of personalism, understood here as the set of philosophical attitudes that affirm the highest value of a personality as a transcending being, involved in a timeless dialogue with other personalities.

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Introduction

In this article, I address the theme of the crisis of humanism. Although this topic has been relevant since Nietzsche, today the prospect of a posthuman society (in the broad sense) is becoming quite real. Humanism has suffered a double blow: on the one hand, as anthropocentrism comes under increasing criticism; on the other hand, as a set of value attitudes that emphasise the unique and exceptional nature of man, which may be radically transformed in the not-too-distant future. In this context, corresponding ethical discourses arise, which state both the inevitability and the desirability of the post-anthropocentric era. Nevertheless, in what follows, I aim to show that discussions about a post-anthropocentric future are far from being concluded. Rather, in stating the problem, the unsatisfactory nature of the available solutions only becomes more glaringly apparent. This problem involves the imminent destruction of the fragile planetary “lifeworld” (or intersubjective space) as a result of chaotic “improvements” carried out by people to their bodies and consciousness. As I will try to show, the destruction of this intersubjective space is fraught with alienation and the multiplication of global risks. Thus, in order to address the problem of increasing unpredictability and mitigate the danger of manmade interventions in human nature, it will be necessary to consider the hypothetical posthuman in close interrelation with the social whole. The necessary “optics” for such an approach is provided by the philosophy of personalism, which can be understood in a broad sense as giving the central role to *personality*, considered as a transcending being in timeless dialogue with other personalities. The main thesis of the article is that, unlike other “post-anthropocentric” philosophical concepts, the personalistic way of understanding reality is more “sensitive” to the issues of maintaining unity, integrity – and, accordingly, the vitality of society.

Humanism: From “Dawn” to “Dusk”?

To begin with, due to ambiguities inherent in the term “humanism” stemming from its use in a variety of contexts, it will be necessary to try to create some conceptual clarity. In a broad sense, humanism can be used to describe any orientation towards human beings in terms of their happiness, material or spiritual well-being, etc. Thus,

for example, one can sometimes find such usages as “Christian humanism”. In what follows, however, the term “humanism” is understood in its narrowest sense as comprising the set of common ideological attitudes within which a human being is considered as a *free, unique, autonomous and terrestrial – or “earthly”– creature*. Humanism, therefore, proceeds: (1) from the immanence of human existence, the humanity of man; (2) from the fact that the ultimate source of higher values, forming a kind of “ethical measuring stick” is man himself, his “interests”; (3) consequently, the consideration of everything else only through the conceptual prism of a person understood only in this way (i.e. anthropocentrism). Here I would like to once again emphasise that, in what follows, humanism is not considered as an ideology in its own right and should therefore not be exclusively associated with e.g. liberalism, since it can also be present in varying philosophical or ideological trends (for example, in sometimes absurd and contradictory combinations in the ideologies of national socialism or communism). Subsequently, we will not additionally distinguish between the various varieties of humanism (e.g. Renaissance, Enlightenment, modern secular humanism, etc.). It is undoubtedly worth pausing to consider the very significant differences between the different varieties of humanism, since these involve the most diverse understandings of man in terms of his nature and essence. At the same time, we will note not so much the specifics as those elements of continuity that allow us to draw conclusions about humanism (and its crisis) as a kind of integral cultural phenomenon or at least an interconnected set of those traits in philosophical thought and everyday thinking that originated in the Renaissance era and which, albeit gradually changing, have survived to this day.

In order to show that “humanistic civilisation” has entered its sunset period, it will be first necessary to clarify what are the constituent elements forming the backbone of humanism itself. Here it will be necessary to take cognisance of the inseparability of *humanism from those processes that gradually led to the formation of bourgeois society* (some historians attribute these changes to the so-called Commercial Revolution, which took place from around the end of the 13th to the 18th century¹). The rise of bourgeois society was accompanied by a disenchantment (Weber, 1905–1910/2002) of the world. As Solomon Stam notes, the advent of humanism (here we are talking about its earliest form during the Renaissance) became possible because at first in the most developed cities of Italy of the 14th–15th centuries, and then in other Western European countries, a capitalist system arose, an early bourgeoisie, adversarial dominant feudalism and its powerful servant – the church (see: Stam, 1984, p. 4). Humanism would not have been possible without first creating a basis for the direct growth of material well-being, providing giving hope for a joyful life together, for incremental progress – in short, the possibility of realising Heaven on Earth. Stam continues that after a millennium that saw the domination of Christian-ascetic ideology proceeding from the dogma of “original sin”, it was as if comprising an inevitable gravitational force over people, concerning the depravity and insignificance of a

¹ This was facilitated by the rapid growth of cities, the emergence of banks, joint-stock companies, the growth of money circulation, the gradual technological progress in navigation, cartography, the discovery of America, etc. (see Spufford, 1989).

person (Innocent III equated a person with a worm, even placing him lower than the worm); and it should have been, first of all, moral to rehabilitate a person, justify his high dignity, his limitless possibilities for improvement and creativity, to which Giannozzo Manetti would refer as “the greatest and immeasurable glory of our humanity” (see: Stam, 1984, p. 6).

Accordingly, in justifying the desire for “earthly” well-being, humanism as “immanent” anthropocentrism rehabilitates what was earlier considered in terms of vice: ambition, the desire to receive earthly pleasures (including “earthly” love) – even, in some cases, greed. The sacralisation of *earthly man* along with his own *earthly aspirations* (not transcendental essences) was expressed in the praise of all the “earthly” ones, from the ubiquitous eroticism and satire of the Decameron (Boccaccio, 1353/2003), the erotic love stories of the Heptameron (Marguerite of Navarre, 1558/1984), Bracciolini’s earthy scatological humour (Bracciolini, 1470/1984), the vulgar jokes and relentless satire of Gargantua and Pantagruel (Rabelais, 1532–1564/2016), Erasmus’ Praise of Folly to the thoroughgoing (not to say humorous) disparagement of all Christianity of Bonaventure Des Périers’ (Des Périers, 1537/1965) in *Cymbalum Mundi*. In his *Utopia*, Thomas More depicts a hedonist society for whom the highest happiness is to have all material wealth in abundance and a “pleasant life”:

The Utopians therefore regard the enjoyment of life – that is, pleasure – as the natural object of all human efforts; and the natural, as they define it, is synonymous with virtuous. However, Nature also wants us to help one another to enjoy life, for the very good reason that no human being has a monopoly of her affections (More, 1516/2003, p. 92).

Moreover, the philosophy of Renaissance humanism is already characterised by an internal antinomy associated with the understanding of “liberation” from the transcendental. The labours of many early humanists are characterised by a duality of evaluations of the “immanent”². It would seem that this dichotomy had already encompassed “in itself” the embryo of the subsequent long (still ongoing) philosophical discussion concerning the shortcomings of “immanent” anthropocentrism, within which framework the philosophy of posthumanism would arise. As noted by R. Chen-Morris, H. Yorán, and G. Zak,

Optimism and doubt are different sides of the same coin as they are minted from the same presupposition of humanist discourse, namely, the undermining of the metaphysical mooring of human reality. Humanist discourse rejects – usually implicitly – the fundamental assumption of the Western philosophical tradition that behind phenomenal reality there is an intelligible and unchangeable substance. Instead, humanists often assume that human reality is an artifact that can be fashioned by human efforts: hence humanism’s sense of liberation, creative

² Even in Petrarch’s “contempt for the world”, we see precisely the internal struggle of striving for the active affirmation of the ambitious contemporaneous “earthly man” with an ascetic worldview (Petrarch, 1343/2011).

cultural energies, and anthropological optimism; and hence the novel historical, ethical, and political theories elaborated by the humanists. But the undermining of the traditional metaphysical order of things necessarily threatens basic beliefs and convictions and creates a sense of cultural dislocation and psychological anxiety. In the intellectual sphere, this shift gave rise to fundamental questions concerning the ultimate foundation of ethics and the legitimation of the political order. It is this ambiguity that characterises the humanist discourse and establishes it as the foundation of modernity itself (Chen-Morris, Yoran, & Zak, 2015, p. 430).

The further evolution of humanism took place mainly in the direction of an “excision” of its former theistic “birthmarks”³. In its mature, completed (“pure”) form, humanism is precisely *secular* (“exclusive”) *humanism*, characterised by the primacy of reason, ethics based on critical thinking – and, of course, the ideal of freedom (Kurtz, 2007).

The Crisis of Humanism: “External” or “Internal”?

The emergence of the critique of humanism may be dated to around the same period as criticism of the Christian worldview started to become a feature of the philosophical thought of the Modern era. Although the isolated “I” of the modern individual subject would give rise to a sense of strength, power, invulnerability to spirits, along with pride and dignity, at the time, it was confronted with a disenchanted world that was typically experienced as flat and empty (Taylor, 2007, p. 593). All of this not infrequently resulted in an urge to overcome the “immanent order” of modern reason, to go beyond the present dimension of a disciplined economic or reproductive activity. Charles Taylor, for example, views some manifestations of romanticism as an attempt to revolutionise the “immanent order”. He writes:

The depth and fullness of ordinary life has been articulated for us in an art which constantly seems to transgress the limits of the natural-human domain. The Romantic sense of nature, for instance, is hard to separate from images of a larger force, or a current of life sweeping through all things. These images, central for instance to Wordsworth’s poetry [...] break the carefully erected boundaries of the buffered identity, which neatly divide mind from nature (Taylor, 2007, p. 701).

The Romantic search for inspiration and “depth” in the boundless forces of nature can be seen as a kind of attempt to break out of the “immanent” order.

To a certain extent, a “anti-humanistic” attitude was characterised by heroic ethics centred around aristocratic military virtues that resisted the humanistic affirmation of the highest value of human life (Taylor, 2007, p. 320). In terms of being impregnated with references to heroic ethics, Nietzsche’s philosophy can also be *conditionally* referred to as anti-humanistic. Nietzsche’s Superman is a being who, in standing *over* the “ordinary” man and his present being, affirms his self-over-others.

³ Here we must emphasise the word “old”, inasmuch as we are talking about medieval theology. Here it is worth noting that Christianity itself also subsequently absorbed the influence of humanism.

Nietzsche considers the lives of individuals to be below the values that the Superman creates (“creating *values* is the true right of masters” (Nietzsche, 1886/2017)). Many of Nietzsche’s ideas were anticipated by Max Stirner, who contraposed humanistic “faith in man” with the egoism of *the Unique*. Stirner’s interpretations of the overwhelming and exclusive “religion of humanism” turned out to be prophetic (we recall, for example, the totalitarian USSR, in which masses of people were destroyed in the name of the abstract “man” of the communist future). As Stirner writes,

If as in the revolution, “the human being” is understood as the “good citizen”, then from this concept of “the human being” come the well-known political offenses and crimes. In all this, the individual, the individual human being, is regarded as scum, and contrarily, the universal human being, “the human being”, is honoured (Stirner, 1845/2017).

Nevertheless, humanism should not be considered solely as a belief in an abstract “person” (the so-called “metaphysical” humanism – see Heidegger, 1946/1978). The fact that such a faith has appeared and still exists only implies that humanism as an “immanent” anthropocentrism has become the source of various corresponding ideological trends connected with the construction of abstractions – or, as Stirner would say, “spooks”. Like Nietzsche, however, Stirner can also be seen in partially humanistic terms. For both thinkers, there is no “higher” reality. There is only the “I” (Superman / The Unique), confronted both by a hostile material world and the “others”. Their philosophy is imbued with love for man as a terrestrial creature, the only difference being that the humanism in question is not misanthropic, but egocentric. One can even say that this is the “purest” anthropocentrism, because the human being itself is taken here not as some kind of abstract whole, but as directly existing. Therefore, we should not be too surprised when Jean-Paul Sartre, in his famous essay “Existentialism is a Humanism”, sets forth ideas that have much in common with Stirner’s ideas. Here, true humanism is to be found in the freedom of choice of an “abandoned” person. Sartre writes:

This is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also, because we show that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realisation, that man can realise himself as truly human (Sartre, 1956/1989).

Nevertheless, humanism gradually “accumulated” contradictions. In the first place, the internal contradiction of humanism inherited from the Renaissance, consisting in an ambiguous combination of the “costs” and “benefits” of rejecting the transcendental, never disappeared. Therefore, strictly speaking, humanism has never been able to achieve absolute dominance or completely push out the transcendent from social life – which today, although in a somewhat individualised form, has maintained its position in the search for religious meaning (Taylor, 2007). Secondly, the “immanent order” of modern societies accumulated its own set of contradictions. Belief in reason, freedom

and human dignity did not end up saving humanity from destructive wars, exploitation, violence and injustice. Serious damage to humanism was inflicted by Sigmund Freud with his criticism of man as a rational autonomous being (see, e.g., Freud, 1927/1949). In the end, this accumulation of contradictions led to serious philosophical criticism of the “predominating” position of humanism. Posthumanism thus emerges as a kind of development and deepening of postmodernism (the term “posthumanism” in the modern sense appears in 1977 (Hassan, 1977)⁴. The philosophy of posthumanism is gradually being formed and developed in the field of literary criticism (Hayles, 1999), as well as in philosophical studies on the deconstruction of “the human”. Today, it is widely represented in feminist discourses (Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Stacy Alaimo, F. Ferrando [Alaimo, 2016; Barad, 2003; Braidotti, 2013; Ferrando, 2019; Haraway, 1991] and others).

In general, posthumanism is characterised by a scepticism towards any idealisation of human subjectivity. Thus, the idea of the Cartesian subject was first deconstructed within the framework of the “linguistic turn”, when it was shown that man comprises a location where discourses intersect, something hidden by the veil of the unconscious; that the free subject is an illusion, and that, in general, as Michel Foucault observes, “man is a recent invention”. Subsequently, however, the conceptual focus has shifted somewhat, with proponents of the “new materialisms” trying to overcome the dualism of matter and culture that resisted the efforts of postmodernists. “The death of the subject” means that, in the material sense, a person is not a “centred” monad point in space. Moreover, between matter and culture there is an “intra-action” – that is, an instantaneous two-way relationship. From this perspective, a person can only be seen as part of a very complex material and cultural “context”. In other words, it is not man, but matter itself that turns out to be “agential” (agential matter – “agent”, acting matter). As Mónica Cano Abadía explains,

This critical posthumanism, indebted with French antihumanism, feminist anti-universalism and anti-colonialism, tries to disconnect the definition of the human of its universalist position. The human within humanism is a “systematised standard of recognisability – of Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location” (Cano Abadía, 2018, p. 173).

To abandon this regulatory notion of the human means to embrace a more complex and a less discriminatory vision of the subject. Thus, a posthuman vision of the subject could lead toward more respectful, anti-universalist, materialist and post-anthropocentric ways of analysing our world (Ibid.). In essence, the posthumanist position entails an abandonment of ethics based on anthropocentrism. “Posthumanism”, writes Francesca Ferrando, “can be seen as a post-exclusivism: an empirical philosophy of mediation, which offers a reconciliation of existence in

⁴ Foucault’s Death of the Subject (Foucault, 1966/1994), Derrida’s grammatology (Derrida, 1967/1977), the collapse of metanarratives in J.-F. Lyotard (Lyotard, 1979/1984), schizoanalysis by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1977) and many more.

its broadest significations. Posthumanism does not employ any frontal dualism or antithesis, demystifying any ontological polarisation through the postmodern practice of deconstruction” (Ferrando, 2013, p. 29).

Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that post-humanism, though dangerous, is not fatal to humanism. In the end, posthumanist criticism focuses mainly on a very specific *ideological* form of humanism. The direct association with humanism of such phenomena as colonialism, racism and male domination by some post-humanist philosophers⁵ seems at least dubious. Here we are again talking about criticism of the humanistic “spooks” (or rather, constructed ideas about the abstract “human”). At the same time, it is possible to doubt the sequence of posthumanistic anti-anthropocentrism. In this form, posthumanism continues to take the form of the self-reflection of the modern “isolated self”. However, ultimately, this “isolated I” cannot offer anything more than a particular recognition of “myself” that emerges from the process (assembly/relational entity, etc.) consisting in the general cosmic order of things. Thus, although a different “spook” is being constructed, a different idea of the abstract “man”, it is already striving for a peaceful life-coexistence within the framework of an infinite variety of different forms of subjectivity, as well as “reconciliation” with “matter” itself (for example, planet Earth and biological processes occurring on it). Here it becomes apparent that we are talking about a new humanistic “spook”. However, if previously the criterion of non-human could be applied to one who did not meet European norms of rationality/subjectivity, today a non-human becomes one who does not agree with the “new” values of tolerance, multiculturalism, etc., towards which posthumanism is ostensibly oriented. While this may no longer be aggressive anthropocentrism (although it is necessary to consider *in relation to whom* this aggression is considered), from the very fact that a “person” recognises his responsibility for aggression or violence against any *other* and from free choice in favour of moving to the “ontological equality” of various forms of being, it is still possible to make out the outlines of anthropocentrism. Rather, it consists in an act of self-reflection, a kind of “goodwill”, but not a consistent and direct departure from the limits of humanism (in fact, in some cases there are no intentions to build any kind of neo-humanism (Braidotti, 2019, p. xiii)⁶.

⁵ R. Braidotti: “The human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalised standard, which acquires transcendent values as the human: from male to masculine and onto human as the universalised format of humanity. This standard is posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualised, racialised, naturalised others and also in opposition to the technological artefact. The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about ‘human nature’” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26).

⁶ Consistent posthumanism would completely deny the anthropocentric view. This would mean, for example, the struggle for recognition of the “right” of SARS-Cov-2 and all other bacteria and viruses to equal existence as forms of vitality/materiality/agency and so on. It would also imply the denial (“deconstruction”) of all elementary “human” categories of thinking (like “tolerance”, the desire for equality, the maintenance of life, etc.). To consistently avoid anthropocentrism, posthumanists should author their writings on the “behalf” of assemblies/relationalities, avoiding all human “proper names” that imply centring on a particular person. However, it turns out to be based on the same anthropocentrism, but with a conscientious (often hypocritical) overlay expressing concern for non-human others.

Far more dangerous to humanism is humanism itself, with the real threat consisting not in “external” criticism, but rather in terms of an “internal” transformation into something hostile to it. And here it is necessary to look not so much at the various ethical positions, not at the sphere of philosophical discussions, but at humanism as a cultural *fact of social life*, as an “immanent” anthropocentrism permeating the consciousness of a modern person. This “immanent” anthropocentrism implies the consideration of man as one of the “objects” of the material world that can undergo a radical transformation. Technological development itself warrants the relatively rapid disappearance of the human, i.e. the very species *Homo Sapiens*. A number of philosophers and researchers argue that sooner or later technologies will allow the creation of superhumans (immortals with “improved” brains and physical abilities), that people will change genes, integrate into the technological environment (i.e. become cyborgs) – and that artificial intelligence technologies will develop giving rise to superconsciousness or super-beings endowed with such a consciousness (or there will be a union of all beings into one super-being, etc.). Here we are talking about the philosophy of transhumanism as espoused by Julian Huxley (Huxley, 1958), Robert Ettinger (Ettinger, 1972), F.M. Esfandiary (Esfandiary, 1989), Nick Bostrom (Bostrom, 2016), Ray Kurzweil (Kurzweil, 2005), and many others. Transhumanist philosophers emphasise the *inevitability* of overcoming humanity’s limitations by means of technology. “Backward” humans will continue to occupy a place either in some kind of zoo reservation or on the fringes of the future civilisation, while the initiative passes to a new race (or races) of intelligent artificially-derived superhuman humanoids (or completely artificial robotic creatures). At the same time as adhering to liberal or libertarian beliefs that advocate the freedom of everyone to control their bodies, most transhumanist authors somewhat paradoxically assert the futility of attempts to prevent the appearance of the transhuman⁷.

However, the prospect of a radical technological transformation of human nature does not in itself imply a crisis of humanism. After all, as has been repeatedly noted by various theorists (see Ferrando, 2019), transhumanist discourses remain primarily anthropocentric in their basic orientation. A genuine crisis of humanism is rather associated with those *dangers* that logically arise from the attempts of human beings to intervene in their own biological natures. This perspective has spawned a whole branch of ethical debate – for example, as seen in polemics between bio-conservatives and techno-liberals (see Bailey, 2005; Fukuyama, 2003; Habermas, 2003, etc.). At the same time, it should be emphasised that the prospect of a radical transformation of human nature is not something that has been “invented” by ideologists or ethics. Rather, it is the reality of a *society* in which the principles of “immanent” anthropocentrism come to prevail. In such a society, the introduction of technologies for changing the nature of man is indeed *inevitable*. In a disconnected and alienated world, in which there is no single organising and controlling centre (after all, the “highest value” of

⁷ As clarified by Y. N. Harari, “This will not happen in a day, or a year. Indeed, it is already happening right now, through innumerable mundane actions. Every day millions of people decide to grant their smartphone a bit more control over their lives or try a new and more effective antidepressant drug. In pursuit of health, happiness and power, humans will gradually change first one of their features and then another, and another, until they will no longer be human” (Harari, 2017, p. 60).

bourgeois society continues to be a certain “isolated” entity, considered in terms of its essential *separateness*), it is impossible to completely ban certain experiments aimed at the transformation of the human body and consciousness. Even if such bans were to be applied in some countries, there would still continue to be numerous “dead zones” that do not fall under the purview of ethical regulation.

What dangers are we talking about here? In most cases, we are talking about potentially unpredictable health risks for those whose bodies will be “improved”, be it genetic engineering (using CRISPR genome editing mechanisms, etc.) or cyborgisation (implantation of mind-changing chips in the brain, etc.). There are also risks associated with the insecurity of human nature transformation technologies themselves (for example, scenarios of uncontrolled self-replication of nanorobots – the so-called “grey goo”). Finally, we can mention potential “social” risks: e.g. unequal access to human improvement technologies, which may result in a further increase in social inequality.

Nevertheless, I consider that these are not the principal problems associated with technologies for changing the nature of a human being. Much more serious, yet rarely-considered despite being the potential source of an infinite number of additional misfortunes, is the very *real prospect of the destruction of human “lifeworld” as a result of an infinite number of “modifications” that make the achievement of global unity unrealistic*: the destruction of the “organic” basis for an empathic commonality of experience due to prevailing practices that radically alter the body and mind. Such a destruction of the “community of experience” is fraught with alienation, the disintegration of humanity into “(post-)humanity” lacking mutual comprehension and the total chaos of untrammelled technological progress. All this can lead to the destruction of the ability to reach consensus, which is fraught with the most adverse consequences imaginable. Therefore, *what is important concerns not so much how we look at various technologies today, but whether we will be able to enter into any constructive dialogue about them in the future?*

We shall not assert that this problem has been completely ignored in modern discourses concerning technologies for changing the nature of man. However, the available responses are not altogether convincing. In briefly considering them, we will also try to outline one of the possible approaches to solving this problem, which can be formulated based on the philosophical optics of personalism.

The End of Dialogue?

From a personalistic perspective, the main problem facing “changing” humanity today can be seen to consist in the “disappearance” of *dialogue* (as a moment of intersubjective unity). There is no philosophical consensus about what constitutes the *essence* of a person: despite many scientific and technological advances, we still do not *know* what a human being is. However, it is difficult to argue with the proposition that all representatives of the species *Homo Sapiens* have something in common. No matter how cultures, languages, social idealities, etc. may vary, there is something that allows all people to at least partially understand the experience of other people,

even those who lived in previous times. Nearly everyone is able to admire the heroic exploits of the characters of the *Iliad* or appreciate the rousing signification of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Although this experience can be perceived by us in a "distorted" sense, i.e. not in the same way it would be perceived by our contemporaries, nevertheless, it still will not be something completely alien for us or inaccessible to our *understanding*. At the genetic level, changes taking place in a human being over thousands of years have been insignificant; therefore, a certain set of common biological processes preserved in the human body and brain still determine repetitive patterns of behaviour conferring the capability of empathic experience (for example, the activity of mirror neurons).

Needless to say, today we live in a world of alienation, full of injustice, cruelty and indifference. Nevertheless, remaining common "species" traits inspire the hope that someday it will be possible to arrive at a more solidary state (the hope for a post-capitalist society, in which the alienating principle of the pursuit of profit is replaced by the principle of solidarity on a global scale is still very much alive (see, e.g., Mason, 2017; Srnicek & Williams, 2015, etc.)). The main obstacle to this is, as already noted, that technologies used to change human nature can destroy that *generality*, which supports – however tenuous and barely noticeable – a unity between people (what can be referred to as a "universal human identity"). How do the proponents of various ethical and philosophical movements respond to this challenge?

As we have already seen, the crisis of humanism is experienced not so much in ideological terms as at a social level. Therefore, it becomes necessary to focus not on the ideological component of humanism *per se*, but rather at how it affects society (or reflects this structure) and what risks connected with further technological development can be mitigated or obviated by this social structure. Since humanism is "genetically" associated with the bourgeois economy (Gorfunkel, 2017), the modern capitalist world-system (see, e.g., Wallerstein, 2004) – along with its inherently competitive struggle and individualism – is also largely a product of humanism (although, of course, we are talking here about an interdependent relationship, expressed in Marxist terms concerning the dialectic of the "basis" and "superstructure"). Along with "improvements" connected with increasing individualisation, such social conditions are likely to lead to an increasing descent into chaos. Thus, it follows from humanism and the forms of transhumanism ensuing from it that people should have *the freedom to change their own organism*. As Gilbert Hottois notes, the vast majority of transhumanists are agnostics or atheists, secularists and free-thinkers. The values and intentions they proclaim are close to modern secular humanism (see Hottois, 2014, p. 48). Liberal and libertarian transhumanists assert that, if an "earthly man", on the basis of his own "earthly" moral principles or preferences, receives technological capabilities allowing him to cease to be a representative of the species *Homo Sapiens*, then such is his choice, which should only be supported. Moreover, all liberal and libertarian transhumanists do is to take this same "earthly man" and unfold the old anthropocentric ethics of the "supremacy of a higher being" over the rest of the world in a new way. Hence, the main problem, for this is the direct path to a chaotic collapse of the processes of transformation of human nature, leading to the destruction of what

can be conditionally designated as the “lifeworld”⁸. As Spanish scholars Armesilla Conde and Santiago Javier point out, transhumanism will give rise to a minority of creatures for an indefinitely long time, economically and politically influential, proud of their way of life, separated from the rest of humanity that experiences less improvement, which will be developed only to maintain the appropriation of capitalist property, of the capitalist division of labour, of capital as the primary element of industrial relationship (see Conde & Javier, 2018, p. 66)⁹.

Since the individualised and atomised society is already characterised by a mass of contradictions, the ultimate diversification of human corporeality will only deepen these contradictions, destroying the already fragile organic “props” of universal solidarity.

Of course, not all forms of transhumanism are blind to issues connected with maintaining the integrity of the social organism. In this connection, so-called *democratic* (social democratic?) transhumanism deserves special attention. For example, James Hughes focuses on problems related to the provision of equal access to “human improvement” technologies, as well as on issues of reaching consensus on the control of technological risks associated with the use of these technologies. However, the main thrust of Hughes’s “social” discourse emphasises the exclusive right of people to something he refers to as “bodily sovereignty”. Hughes writes:

We not only need to radicalise our understanding of citizens, the bearers of rights, but also of the rights we have to control our bodies and minds, and the structures we need to make those freedoms real. The right to control our bodies and minds should include the right of sane adults to change and enhance their own minds and bodies, to own our own genetic code, to take recreational drugs, to control our own deaths, and to have ourselves frozen. Procreative liberty, an extension of the right to control our body and life, should include the right to use germinal choice technologies to ensure the best possible life for our children. Strong democratic government is required not only to protect these rights, but to ensure that the technologies are tested for safety so that consumers understand their risks and benefits. We also need strong social democracies to ensure all citizens have access to these options, not just the affluent (Hughes, 2002; see also Hughes, 2004).

⁸ The understanding of “lifeworld” here is close to that expressed in the work of Jurgen Habermas. According to Habermas, “the lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticise and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements. In a sentence: participants cannot assume *in actu* the same distance in relation to language and culture as in relation to the totality of facts, norms, or experiences concerning which mutual understanding is possible” (Habermas, 1987, p. 126).

⁹ Accordingly, “liberal-libertarian” transhumanism turns the old idea of perfecting man inside out, reducing him to a purely technological problem. As Nicolas le Dévédec remarks, “in its journey from the Enlightenment to transhumanism, the notion of perfectibility has been particularly distorted. Though it refers to a political project and an improvement of human beings in and by society in the Enlightenment (proposed in particular by Jean-Jacques Rousseau), it is simplified in transhumanist rhetoric to the technoscientific adaptation of the human being and of life itself. For transhumanism, politically changing the world is no longer the question” (le Dévédec, 2018, p. 3).

Admittedly, a “democratic” approach may help to mitigate “direct” risks, but it will not solve the problem of maintaining a “communicative whole”. Sooner or later, “improved” (post-)people will lose their ability to sympathise with everyone else and, as a consequence, will cease to share a common human identity (I would label such a hypothetical situation with the term “*great misunderstanding*”).

Here we can assume that the problem consists in the “immanent” order of modernity. At the same time, any appeal to the transcendental is likely to lead to even greater risks of destruction of the already tenuous layer of the universal human “lifeworld”. There have been many recent attempts to include the idea of technological “improvement” of a person in various religious discourses (see, e.g., Cole-Turner, 2008; Donaldson & Cole-Turner, 2018; Maher & Mercer, 2009; Maher & Mercer, 2014, and other). In other words, although an appeal to the transcendent can function as a source of basic values and life guidelines (for example, God the Father as something that binds all that exists into a single whole, etc.), a transcendental *a priori* cannot form the basis of social unity – at least, not on a global scale. However, in adhering to the positions of humanistic naturalism, we can at least – as Francis Fukuyama does – appeal to “natural equality” (Fukuyama, 2003).

As we already noted, human nature provides the vast majority of people with a basic set of behaviour patterns, including the universal capacity for empathy. Since, by its very nature, what is transcendent is fundamentally unknowable, anyone may have their own ideas about it – or, for that matter, may choose not to acknowledge its existence in any way. As history clearly shows, all attempts to universalise the transcendent have led to aggression, wars, extremism, the destruction of trusting relationships, etc. When it comes to factors of estrangement, it is clear that religious disputes can only “add fuel to the fire”. However, we can say that mainstream religious worldviews predominating in contemporary society have either been supplanted by “immanent” humanism and have, as a consequence, become highly individualised (Taylor, 2007).

From here, it is possible to progress to a “posthumanistic” position, in which the emphasis is shifted from the person to agency *per se* and whose claims to universality repudiate all hierarchical forms of organisation. If all forms of being are fundamentally equal, then social unity is feasible precisely in such a denial of all totality. Thus, the idea of de-universalisation (deconstruction) can itself become universal and unifying. If there is no longer such a thing as a universal Truth, then there remains only the universal *enjoyment of diversity and the freedom to play with various significations*. Here we see something akin to the Christian idea of unconditional love. The postmodern philosopher Gianni Vattimo aptly notes that in the era of the collapse of metanarratives, the Christian doctrine of universal love experiences a second birth along with the decline of metaphysics as a systematic philosophy (or the possibility of such philosophies), capable of offering a coherent, unified, strictly justified picture of the unchanging structures of being, having itself exhausted the possibility of a philosophical refutation of the existence of God (see Vattimo, 2007, p. 22).

This also means that it is possible to take another look at the idea of Christian love through a distinctive kind of “weakening of being”. Every life, writes Vattimo, is

nothing but a perfect enjoyment of the meanings and spiritual forms produced by the history of mankind and constituting the “kingdom of immortality” (see Vattimo, 2007, p. 65). Under the pretext of combatting humanistic myths and affirming true diversity, posthumanism actually leads to a blurring (as it were, “comparing”) of differences (as, for example, occurs in the desire to blur gender differences in the future cyborg society imagined by Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1985)). As the posthumanist philosopher Francesca Ferrando writes, “posthumanism challenges biocentrism, sentiocentrism, vitalism, and the concept of life itself, blurring the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, in a quantum approach to the physics of existence” (Ferrando, 2019, p. 5). Within this approach, the human “dissolves” into matter, breaking up into atoms (“waves”, “assemblies”, “relativities”, “vibrations”) to reach a state in which everything is intertwined with everything else. Although this might sound attractive in theory, it is not at all clear how it can be put into practice. Here posthumanistic discourses can be seen to possess a certain critical energy, which nevertheless starts to flag whenever its creative potential is called into question. In this case, there is nothing with which to replace humanism, due to the tendency of posthumanism to establish a “negative” agenda (i.e. to deny some points of mastery and dominance), while little attention is paid to maintaining social unity. Posthumanistic discourses can thus be seen as focusing on *distancing*¹⁰ rather than on unity and transformation. Finally, many controversial contemporary social phenomena can be described in terms of a movement toward posthumanism: the erasing of cultural differences, the emergence of human-gadget, human-product and product-human blends, the hybridisation of person and machine, as well as the prospect of disposing of people considered “superfluous” to the contemporaneous economy into the virtual space (Fishman & Davydov, 2015). In the *Manifesto of Metahumanism* (metahumanism comprises a movement within which a philosophical synthesis of posthumanism and transhumanism is attempted), authored by Jaime Del Val and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, we find the following:

It deepens the view of the body as field of relational forces in motion and of reality as immanent realised process of becoming which does not necessarily end up in defined forms or identities, but may unfold into endless amorphogenesis. Monsters are promising strategies for performing this development away from humanism (Del Val & Sorgner, 2011).

However, it is hard to understand how “monsters” resulting from unrestrained and chaotic self-transformations can even share common experience or emotions, let alone agree on socially significant problems having a global scope.

Thus, as we have discussed, the crisis of humanism is not *in the first place* an ideological crisis. Rather, it is a crisis of “immanent” anthropocentrism as a broad

¹⁰ R. Braidotti: “We have to realise that, contrary to the Marxist-Leninist idea of a global revolution, the changes that we can achieve are collective, but step by step, by distancing ourselves. Look at how feminism has shown us how to distance ourselves from male violence. Or how anti-racism has shown us how to distance ourselves from white supremacy. The point is to distance ourselves. It is like an exercise in detoxification. We have to detoxify our bad habits, in our way of consuming, of thinking, and of relating with others” (Andrés, 2019).

cultural phenomenon, serving to legitimise, in particular, the modern capitalist world-system. The essence of this crisis lies in the destructive potential of the activities of the “immanent man”. Moreover, the main problem here is not so much that the modern order is capable of creating global problems that could potentially lead to the destruction of life on Earth, but rather that the “immanent man”, as a result of interventions in his body and consciousness, risks breaking the last strings that connect him with other people in common *humanity*. In the latter case, the mechanisms of empathy and collective reflexivity are destroyed, which is a direct path to an ultra-alienated society. In order to solve this problem to overcome such a crisis, a shift in ethical optics is necessary. Accordingly, the focus of our consideration should shift from the human as “being present” (*Dasein*) to *personality forming an organic part of the social organism*. Such optics can be provided by the philosophy of personalism.

A Personalistic Perspective?

We should start by noting that the term “personalism” has many possible meanings. We can take “personalism” to refer to that idealistic philosophy, which asserts that the real is the personal. Within the framework of this approach, it is assumed that personality is substantial, i.e., comprising the primary form of being. However, here personality is not only substantial, but forms the primary category, within which any explanation of reality may be proposed on the basis of personal “attributes”: consciousness, thinking, self-awareness, individuality, goal-setting, progress towards an established goal, modes of development, etc. Accordingly, it is asserted that God, comprising *personality per se*, is real. This understanding is most closely related to Christian tradition, being rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Niels Gregersen, the doctrine of the Trinity was truly revolutionary in relation to pre-Christian thought due to the fact that the very existence of God began to be seen as consisting in acts of communication. Divine personalities (*prosopa = hypostaseis*) are defined as existing in relationships, in communication. Thus, the Father is the Father only in relation to the Son, the Son is the Son only in relation to the Father, the Spirit is the Spirit only in relation to the Father from whom it emanates. It is only in the mutual surrender and perichoresis of divine personalities that God exists as God (see Gregersen, 2013, p. 11).

Modern forms of personalism arose as a kind of reaction to the depersonalising elements in the rationalism of the Enlightenment, including pantheism, Hegelian absolute idealism, individualism, as well as political collectivism informed by materialistic, psychological and evolutionary determinism.

Although personalism is very closely associated with Christian theology, there are also aspects of personalism that not only go beyond the Christian philosophical picture of the world, but also beyond religion itself. Personalism affirms the supreme reality and value of personality, i.e. both divine superpersonality and a human person in dialogue with it (in the image and likeness of God). The personalistic approach emphasises the significance, uniqueness and integrity of personality, as well as its fundamentally relational (dialogic) or social dimension (Williams & Bengtsson, 2018).

Since we cannot consider all possible personalistic philosophical currents here (not least on account of their diversity and abundance), instead we will try to state the position that seems most relevant to the context of philosophical discussions about technologies for changing the nature of man. The personalism to which we now turn is not represented by a specific philosophical school or movement. Rather, it consists in an attitude, a way of thinking that can be present in certain people, regardless of whether they consider themselves to be personalist philosophers or not. Moreover, it makes no difference whether a particular discourse is defined as “religious” or not. Here we will agree with Jean Lacroix, according to whom personalism is not a philosophy in the proper sense of the word. Or, seen another way, it is possible that not one, but several philosophical concepts of personalism exist, feeding on the same inspiration, but deriving from it various, largely dissimilar teachings: there are, for example, atheistic and Christian concepts of personalism, not to mention many others (see Lacroix, 2004, pp. 15–16). Accordingly, we refer here to personalism as consisting in a particular view of the world, in which the focus is on the being of *personality as an organic part of the social whole* (here we must separately emphasise the word “organic” – see below).

At this point, we will pause to make a necessary distinction, since the term “personality” has its own special meaning in the personalistic “tradition”. This does not refer to the same thing as each and every individual or individuality. In the context of personalism, personality exceeds the set of “social qualities” of an individual human being. The philosophers Nikolay Berdyaev (Berdyaev, 2010; 2018), E. Mounier (Mounier, 1999), Jean Lacroix (Lacroix, 2004), and many others understood personality as an ecclesial being constituted as such by mode of existence and independence of being; this existence is supported through the adoption of a hierarchy of freely applicable and internally experienced values, through responsible inclusion in activity and a constant process of conversion; thus, it carries out its activities in freedom and, moreover, develops its vocation in all its originality through creative acts (see Mounier, 1999, p. 301).

In other words, a personality is a *spiritual being involved in creative activity who actively asserts him- or herself through an intersubjective individuality*. Here it is necessary to once again emphasise that personalism implies a fundamental distinction between the terms “personality” and “individual” or “individuality”. This difference could not be more perfectly expressed by Nikolay Berdyaev. According to him, the concept of personality should not be confused with the concept of the individual, as frequently occurred in the thought of the 19th and 20th centuries. Since the individual implies a naturalistic category, i.e. biological and sociological, the concept appertains to the natural world. If, from a biological point of view, an individual forms part of a genus, then from a sociological perspective it functions in terms of forming part of society. That is to say, it comprises an atom – indivisible, without internal life, anonymous. Thus, an individual cannot be said to have an existence independent of genus or society. In itself, the individual is an inherently generic and social being, only an element or part defined by its interrelationship with the whole. Personality, on the other hand, has a completely contrasting meaning, which derives from spiritual and religious categories.

Personality speaks of a person's belonging not only to the natural and social order, but also to another dimension of being, to the spiritual world. Therefore, personality invokes a higher order of being than the natural and social. We will see that it cannot be part of anything whatsoever.

Society tends to consider personality in terms of an individual subordinate, as something that it owns due to having created it. From a sociological point of view, personality indeed forms a part of society – and a very small part at that. Thus, if society comprises a big circle, personality represents a small circle inserted into it. On a sociological basis, personality lacks the ability to oppose itself to society and cannot fight for its own interests. However, from the point of view of existential philosophy, the opposite is true: society is a small part of personality, merely its social aspect; even the world is only a part of personality. It is not society nor nature that form an existential centre but personality, which cannot be reduced to object but is always an existential subject. Of course, personality realises itself through social and cosmic existence, but it can only do this due to a principle that is independent both of nature and of human society forming within it. Personality is not defined as a part in relation to any whole (by “part of the whole” here Berdyaev means precisely a mechanical, instrumental unit as part of the whole. In what follows, I will use the more appropriate term “organic part of the whole” – D.D.). Personality is itself a totality, integrating the universal in itself and refusing to be part of any generality, world or society, universal or even Divine Being. Since personality is not in any way natural, it does not belong to an objective natural hierarchy and cannot be inserted into any natural series. Rooted in the spiritual world, the existence of personality presupposes a dualism of spirit and nature, freedom and determinism, individual and general, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar. The existence of human personality in the world suggests that the world is not self-sufficient, that the transcendence of the world is inevitable, its completion being found not in itself, but in God, the supermundane being. The freedom of the human personality is freedom not only in society and in the state, but also from society and from the state, determined by the fact of forming an exception to the world, an exception to nature and society, an exception to the kingdom of Caesar (see Berdyaev, 1999).

Here, we should not be confused by the appeal to the term “existential”. In the sense that personalism is the philosophical attitude of a “sufferer” confronted with the abyss of its own subjective non-existence, the personalistic attitude is very close to the existentialist position. Nevertheless, the personalist philosophers *tend to avoid all individualism*. In experiencing its finiteness and mortality, as well as the emptiness of the modern “immanent order”, the personalistic “personality” experiences something like “existential suffering”. However, it is not by reflective “withdrawal into oneself” (as, for example, in Sartre), but by transcending *or going beyond one's own limits – i.e. by becoming an involved, social being* – that it is possible to escape from this condition. Thus, we may also consider personalism as a distinctive philosophy of acquiring the *sense of life* by means of an “active” appeal to the eternal. Such an appeal is possible either by means of *creative dialogue* with the divine superpersonality, or through *involved* being in this world. A man struggles with his finiteness and mortality, with all

“dissolving” tendencies; in so doing, he is *included* in what can be designated as *eternal*. This “inclusion” or involvement occurs without loss of individuality, as a face portrays the uniqueness of *countenance*. On the other hand, it is exactly in creative activity that true individuality can be exercised, which receives its meaningful content in *dialogical relationship with others*. Personalism, therefore, invokes the space of *intersubjectivity*. At the same time, we understand intersubjectivity specifically in terms of *sincere understanding of the other, i.e. compassion or “sympathy” for his or her experience*. Here, personality is subjectivity (*including inherent subjectivity*), which *transcends the biological matter of its medium, in the intersubjective space of culture*.

It may be objected that, if considering personalism as a certain tendency or the aggregate of some characteristic premises of thinking, then the features of personalism can be found in many philosophical trends. Thus, a personalistic way of thinking (although often not in its entirety!) can be seen in Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of the noosphere (the noospheric planetary unity of mankind here functioning as an analogue of the personalistic “superpersonality”) (Teilhard de Chardin, 1955/2008), the personalistic *spirit* of Russian religious philosophy (from Vladimir Soloviev and Fedor Dostoevsky to Aleksei Losev [see Kolesnichenko, 2018]), the philosophy of cosmism of Nikolai Fedorov, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Vladimir Vernadsky and others, as well as the communist *god-building* project of Anatoly Lunacharsky (Lunacharsky, 1925), and others.

Nevertheless, special attention should also be paid to Marxism, which in many of its variations is very close to the personalist worldview (for example, some works of Freudo-Marxist Erich Fromm are conceptually very similar to the works of the personalist philosopher Emmanuel Mounier (see, e.g., Fromm, 1955/1990, 2013). The proximity of personalism and Marxism has been repeatedly noted by the classic personalist writers themselves (see Lacroix, 2004, pp. 290–535). Such proximity should not be surprising, since in both philosophical traditions *people are no longer considered as isolated beings, but rather as located between the immediate bodily, biological being and the social organism*. There can be no such thing as an isolated “personality”, any more than personality can be located in the faceless, mechanical part of the collective whole. Karl Marx himself showed a particular sensitivity to this question, describing man as an “ensemble of social relations” (Marx, 1969). In his exploration of Marx’ philosophical and anthropological ideas, Pyotr N. Kondrashov cites the following features of the author’s personalistic understanding of man: a person is both originally built into the object-external world (nature, culture, society, the world of symbols, social consciousness) as well as being in a dialectical relationship with it, forming and revealing itself in the intersubjectivity of social relations, experiencing its being-in-the-world as a suffering person in the form of partial, existential relations-to-the-world and to-oneself (see Kondrashov, 2019, pp. 154–165). Therefore, for Marx, more important than all other questions was the achievement of a social condition that would eliminate *alienation* between people. The movement towards such a state could also be described as *humanism* (i.e. “genuine”, “real” humanism, etc.). However, from the point of view of semantics, it would be preferable to consider this in terms of *personalism*, since it is assumed

that there can be no autonomous, free, truly “personal” being as long as the social organism is loaded with contradictions. If, strictly speaking, there is no dialogue (but there is monological “imposition”, “violence”, “coercion”, “deception”, “repression”, “insincerity”, etc.); if there is an alienation of individual public “bodies” (or even “cells”) with respect to the organic whole, then the human “I” is not free (i.e. it does not seem to belong to itself), because it is (and is being formed!) in the discursive chaos of hostile forces. This point should be emphasised due to its relevance in the context of attempts to change human nature: “personality”, according to this approach, cannot have any kind of independent existence or be confined to an isolated *natural* container such as the individual human brain. Thus, personality consists in a set of relationships converging in a certain *relatively* autonomous whole. This statement recognises the posthumanistic approach discussed above. However, for Marx, along with many other personalist philosophers, a person cannot be liberated from the “fetters” that confuse and oppress him unless or until the social organism itself is freed from its internal contradictions as an intersubjective *whole*¹¹.

In this sense, Marxism is essentially personalistic. However, here we by no means assert that Marxism is the same thing as personalism. Although we have seen that personalistic intuitions are present in many Marxist schools, we should also consider some elements of Marxism that would appear to be hostile to personalism. For example, personalistic philosophers have repeatedly criticised depersonalising interpretations of Marx’s philosophy, which reduce the being of personality to class categories in a kind of “tilt” towards collectivism (Berdyayev, 1999). It would also seem that historical relativism and anthropological praxis involving essentialist doctrines concerning humanity (see Kondrashov, 2019, pp. 91–153) are somewhat contrary to the personalistic way of thinking. In reducing the essence of humanity to a revolutionary change in the person and his/her environment, a consideration of subjectivity is constrained to the context of the present set of social relations, thus denying the essential personalistic idea of eternal dialogue. In this case, a public organism (the “totality” of social relations) is considered only in the context of a certain temporal discreteness, within which elements of the “new” are extrinsic (alien) to the elements of the “old”. In this regard, a real dialogue of personalities (and, therefore, a truly inalienable personal being) becomes impossible as a consequence of the denial of intersubjective continuity. Here we will draw attention once again to the

¹¹ Karl Marx: “Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have, in two ways, affirmed himself, and the other person. (1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and, therefore, enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also, when looking at the object, I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses, and, hence, a power beyond all doubt. (2) In your enjoyment, or use, of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work, that is, of having objectified man’s essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another man’s essential nature. (3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. (4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realised my true nature, my human nature, my communal nature. Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature.” (Marx, 1966, pp. 126–127).

“existential” component of personalism: an inalienable personality can only find life to be meaningful through engagement in eternal or *timeless* dialogue. In this context, a personalist is any person who strives to ensure that his or her activity involves some kind of *meaning*, comprising a kind of *being for the sake* of descendants. Accordingly, if the intersubjective space of culture is subjected to rupture, then any meaning appertaining to the personal existence of living people is lost. For this reason, personalism implies a rather negative attitude towards the transhumanistic rhetoric of a “rupture” leading to the transition to a new, “postsingularity” level of consciousness (for example, Ray Kurzweil’s computron (Kurzweil, 2012)). According to personalist ethics, any creation of “monsters” with which it is impossible engage in sincere dialogue starts to look something like collective suicide. Even if the “monsters” themselves do not pose an immediate danger, this scenario would rupture the relatively fragile strands that bind humanity into a single intersubjective whole.

It should have already become clear that personalistic optics implies an appeal to social holism – here it is emphasised once again that we refer to an “organic”, not a mechanical (!) whole. Relatively speaking, the crisis of humanism pertains to the *humanistic society* in which the individual and his or her “earthly being” forms the “centre” of the universe (and worldview). Conversely, a personalistic society (as a normative ideal) is first and foremost one comprised of those who strive to become part of a bigger picture, taken in the timeless (absorbed into eternity) dimension of the intersubjective space of culture (history, memory, etc.). This is neither consumerism nor hedonism, neither thrillseeker nor everyman, but rather encompasses those who go beyond the narrow framework of material existence, striving *for an active creative statement in the world*. However, such an ideal can only be constructive if the person is striving *for mutual love and the unity of the intersubjective space itself*. One of the most significant axiological shortcomings of both post- and transhumanism is their focus on the destruction of all intersubjective unity. Posthumanism, as we have seen, entails risks leading to value chaos, while transhumanism leads to chaotic technological transformations of the human species, which can lead to the complete disappearance of that which serves as the basis for possible *commonality of experience*, as well as affection and feelings. Post- and trans-humanism can thus be seen as two essentially different paths to the destruction of a common mental space, to total alienation and the *destruction of commonality*. Conversely, the ideal of personalism implies that the larger (wider, deeper, longer up to eternity) the intersubjective space, the stronger the unity of the person with the entire world (for example, through creativity aimed at the benefit of all of Humanity).

We will try to concretise the foregoing regarding its prospects for technological transformations of human nature.

1. First of all, it is worth noting that the personalist perspective – at least in the version that we are considering here – implies its own “ethical perspective”, in which the focus is placed not on the individual, but on the personality forming an organic part of the social whole (here, the social whole should be understood as the *human social whole whose formation takes place on a planetary scale*). Thus, it is meaningless to consider ethical problems associated with trying to change human

nature if the ethical problems of a changing society are ignored. This position finds agreement with Habermas' position that irreversible interventions in the genes of unborn children should not be allowed, since this implies a "predetermination from the outside" (Habermas, 2003) involving a kind of "ontological lack of freedom". However, no less unfree is the one whose "I" is formed in a monological (alienated) framework of social relations. It should be borne in mind that the biological "substrate" of innate physicality serves as a kind of "barrier" that protects against manipulative external interventions in subjectivity (for example, while advertising can encourage a person to buy sparkling water, it does not in itself generate thirst). However, the technological "erosion" of this biological "barrier" has the potential to make people more vulnerable to such "transforming" power. Here, it is irrelevant if the changes are reversible or not, or whether they are the subject of formal consent. In an alienated world, overcoming such "natural" boundaries is the path to absolutely asymmetric relationships (for example, when a person ceases to understand whether he or she really is the person as whom he or she identifies or whether he or she (or some other gender identification) has been completely "constructed" by someone else).

2. Accordingly, truly symmetrical, dialogical relations are possible only if the main social contradictions are "resolved": socio-economic inequality on a global scale, the division of humanity into hostile nations, poverty and indigence, aggression and exploitation, etc. Only in such a case is it possible to predict the advent of personal freedom. This is also a kind of "posthumanistic" perspective, since the "authenticity" of a person's personality is then considered in terms of the *transparency of the communicative space*. A personality does not belong to itself until it participates on an equal footing in a collective, (self-)identification as an equally-valued and equally-participating member of a social organism (there is no paradox here since "immersion" in a social whole and dependency on it are inevitable: the only question is whether this "whole" is hostile or friendly, whether it is partly "mine" too). Therefore, the ethical priority in this case is expressed in the desire for at least an approximate achievement of a "disengaged" state, i.e. the struggle for a post-capitalist future (see, e.g., Davydov, 2020), direct e-democracy (see, e.g., Fuller, 2015), world citizenship¹², etc., and only then – balanced and gradual technological interventions in the human body. Such a perspective is certainly no more utopian than transhumanistic anticipations of technological singularity, universal cyborgisation, or, say, the construction of the above-mentioned computron.

3. The main danger associated with technologies for changing human nature is associated with the potential chaos of bodily and mental transformations, which can lead to the destruction of the universal human intersubjective space (lifeworld). The only obvious means by which this can be countered consists in collective reflexivity. At the same time, it is clear that simple democratic declarations or appeals to the existing mechanisms of nation states or international organisations will not be sufficient. What is needed is not more formal prohibitions or permits, but a genuine *rapprochement* of people on a global scale: a movement towards understanding and the possibility of sincerity. In this connection, the "noospheric" optics of Teilhard de

¹² World standardisation: <https://www.mundialization.ca/about-hmc/history-of-mundialization/>

Chardin might seem to offer the best fit. A growth in global consciousness (collective self-awareness) becomes necessary due to a constant increase in complexity of the human social organism itself. Conversely, a lack of connectivity, “centring” and “nervous” (communicational) sensitivity or coordination of the social whole can lead to a systemic inability of mankind to prevent global catastrophes. In demonstrating to what extent the human organisation is “ungathered” or “mismatched” on a global scale, the COVID-19 pandemic recalls the postmodern “body without organs”: humanity is not able to recognise itself in its entirety (totality) or make timely, reflective decisions. Under such conditions, endless (and unprecedented!) interventions in the human body and consciousness are likely to lead to the destruction of what unites people into a single unified species (without “bodily” understanding, the possibility of achieving mutual understanding of the “social” becomes extremely doubtful). In addition, the technologies for changing human nature, as already noted above, are freighted with all kinds of inherent risks.

4. A personalistic perspective does not exclude the possibility of carrying out technological “improvements” to the human body. Rather, such improvements should be dialogical and transparent. In this context, we may simply remark that personalistic ethical optics is free of many of the essentialist features of anthropocentrism. A person is someone with whom I, also a person, can enter into sincere relationships, one whom I can try to understand and towards whom I can experience empathic feelings. Finally, a person is someone who is in the same dialogical and symmetrical relationship with the social whole in which I also participate. Therefore, a purely biological personality can be non-human in the “natural” sense. But if someone “drops out” or “withdraws into the shadows”, losing the ability to engage in dialogue, sincerity, love, then, for the public organism, such an element may turn out to be something like a cancerous tumour, representing a mortal danger. Accordingly, the personalistic approach suggests that all kinds of transformations of the human body should flow out of social dialogue itself, collectively and excluding any intersubjective asymmetry.

5. Finally, the desire for unity of the intersubjective space of culture, affirmed by personalism, implies a special, “existential” view. The state of personalistic unity and integrity (“collectedness”) is possible only within the framework of continuity. “Novelty” is to be celebrated not as something that breaks intersubjective space, but in its *enrichment or transformation* of this space. Otherwise, we are merely discussing the existence of what is *alien*. Such activities are, therefore, only meaningful to the extent that they are addressed to eternity. The person finds him- or herself not only in being present in the here and now, but also in the social whole, which goes beyond the boundaries of *the present*. Thus, personality does not exist here and now, but rather in the timeless dialogue of everyone with everyone else. Only in and through such a dialogue does personality acquire ontological status. Therefore, technological “improvements” to human beings can be directed not only to the future, but also to the past, i.e. towards an understanding of past experience including aesthetic enjoyment of what has already been. Maintaining the reflective unity of the social organism involves a *consolidation* of past and future.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, I have tried to show that the historical phenomenon of humanism (as “imminent” anthropocentrism) is in deep crisis. Moreover, this crisis is not limited to strictly ideological considerations. In essence, it is a crisis of humanistic anthropocentrism itself, which provides the impulse towards mechanisms of technological changes in the biological nature of individuals. Such “improvements” in the conditions of existing alienated social relations are likely to lead to the destruction of the universal human “lifeworld”, a further increase in disunity and to general misunderstanding (up to the complete loss of the ability to empathise). In the long run, we are talking about the disintegration of a relatively unified humanity into many (at best, autonomous; at worst, mutually hostile) *humanities*. In this article, I have tried to show that many of the concepts of a post-anthropocentric future that are available today do not offer any reasonable solution to this problem. In response to this lacuna, a personalistic alternative is presented, which places personality – considered as an organic part of the global social whole – at the centre of the consideration. Here it is important to emphasise the risk that humanity may presently be approaching a situation where further centrifugal forces applied to an already atomised society (consisting of *people* considered as self-identical) threaten an “ideal storm” in terms of an outsurge of accumulated problems. Such a “storm” will quickly overwhelm a fragmented “posthumanity”, which is at best incapable of mutual understanding; at worst, comprising a society of monsters. As we have seen, only a humanity unified by a timeless dialogue between personalities can hope to emerge from such a maelstrom unscathed. Nevertheless, personalism does not exclude the possibility of changing human nature. On the other hand, would not it be necessary to first address much more important problems associated with alienation and disconnection, creating an atmosphere, in which any “improvement” is fraught with “superiority” and the destruction of the “lifeworld”? Therefore, in taking a personalistic approach, people should first understand each other and the world around them, multiply sincere and warm relationships many times, and only then seriously think about “improving” the human body and consciousness.

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