

TRANSHUMANISM AND POSTHUMANISM IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

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The article examines the definitions of transhumanism and posthumanism and explores the interdisciplinary foundation of these two terms. The examination is carried out in the context of the crisis of the humanities which has an effect on the trans- and posthumanism concepts as well as the prospect of interdisciplinary perspectives. The article aims at providing a general understanding of the topic and a feel for the essence of the questions at hand that could provide foundation for further discussions and research.

Keywords: transhumanism; posthumanism; crisis; humanities; interdisciplinary studies.

In the 21st century, when the world is facing a time of turmoil, uncertainty, fluctuation and fundamental change headed by technological, scientific and social metamorphoses that seem to promise either heavenly divinity or dystopian doom, questions about the nature of humans and their future are becoming a point of grave of importance. Posthumanist and transhumanist movements are coming to the foreground to provide answers to these pressing questions. Philosophical contemplations of this kind are sparking much discussion not only within bohemian socratic cafes, but are becoming more and more of a pressing topic across the humanities and social sciences (HSS) as well as within the general public. Just like technological and scientific transformations are often perceived through a polarized point of view, so are transhumanism and posthumanism. On the one side there are visions of the rise of the Homo Deus, a technologically and biologically augmented being that is as superior to Homo Sapiens as Homo Sapiens is superior to apes. The other side views the prospects of transhumanism and posthumanism as risky human experiments that are bound to have a devastating result. In this article we will try to establish what is transhumanism and posthumanism and explore their interdisciplinary foundation without which these philosophical ventures become redundant. The purpose of this article is to provide a general understanding of the topic and a feel for the essence of the questions at hand.

For decades scientific and technological advances have been building grounds for doubting and questioning the main doctrines of the human condition. Transhumanism and posthumanism can be considered to be the most outspoken forms of this phenomenon. Both these terms put under question what

it means to be human, both movements raise the question of what it could mean to go beyond human. It can be a bit tricky to try to determine what exactly sets these two terms apart. One of the ways of looking at it is by considering the following sequence: human – transhuman – posthuman. Transhumanism can be viewed as a transitional phase leading to posthumanism. Transhumanism can be perceived as a kind of contemporary renewal of humanism, a renewal of the core secular and Enlightenment values that include individualism, rationality, progress and the power of science. Transhumanism is a relatively unambiguous term encompassing techno-optimism and a belief in the essentiality of some elements of human nature, the situation is a bit different with the term posthumanism. It is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of views and conceptions that all share several points in common – they reject the basic values and concepts of humanism; they question the concept of human beings in terms of our engagement and interaction with technologies; they presume the formation of a new narrative that will replace that of the Homo Sapiens. If transhumanism at least partly embraces the traditions of humanism, posthumanistic views are based on refusing and discarding humanism [1]. Historian Yuval Noah Harari views transhumanism as a plausible scenario that will inevitably bring us to posthumanism – even if humanity chooses a more transhumanist approach that aims to salvage traditional humanism, technological and scientific progress will eventually reveal all those values and traditions to be myths and fictions [2].

When discussing these two terms it is important to remember that they both grew out of the fertile soil of interdisciplinary studies both within the hard and soft sciences. While it may seem more natural to suppose that the hard sciences with focus on technological progress would be the main locomotive behind the terms, their development was actually greatly fueled by interdisciplinary studies within the HSS. For example, one of the leading posthumanist philosophers Francesca Ferrando basis her line of thought on interdisciplinary areas such as media, gender and postcolonial studies. As transhumanism and posthumanism gain speed within the general discourse they do so hand in hand with «the radical wave of theory that includes feminist, postcolonial and anti-racist critical theory, environmental activists, disability rights advocates, queer and LGBT theorists» [3, p. xii].

Post- and transhumanist ideas are being unraveled in the context of the so-called «long crisis in the humanities» which can be justifiably extended to social sciences. The named above «radical wave of theories» was fueled by and

interconnected with the ongoing crisis. In April 2015 University Singidunum in Belgrade, Serbia held a major international conference to address the crisis and reflect on the ways that it could be transcended. Though the results of the conference offered a broad scope of possible solutions the main takeaway was that they are all grounded in fostering transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. It seems that the interdisciplinary perspective for the HSS is not an advantageous offer to consider but a vital necessity. [4, p. 1-8]. Both transhumanism and posthumanism appeared and exist within an interdisciplinary framework, this framework is an inherent part of these two ideas. The mentioned above crisis in the humanities can be understood as having fueled the development of transhumanism and posthumanism views. Simultaneously these movements have to some degree contributed to the furthering of the crisis within HSS while simultaneously cementing grounds for interdisciplinary studies that could potentially help resolve it. Despite the seemingly deep connection of transhumanism and posthumanism to humanities and social science (HSS), some researchers believe that these ideas have actually lost the ties that their founders had with the HSS. Professor of history Hava Tirosh-Samuelson states that «Whereas the British “prophets” of transhumanism were highly literate men who were at home in the humanities and the arts, the contemporary transhumanist community is dominated by engineers and computer scientists who lack the humanistic imagination their British antecedents received in England’s elite schools» [1, p. 59]. Futurist FM-2030, one of the first to introduce transhumanism in its more modern version, believed that the «the most urgent problem facing us is not social – economic – political» but rather problems pertaining to human biological limitation and technological advances [1, p. 10]. A point could be made that the crisis discussed earlier may have perhaps contributed to this tendency. Generally speaking, it could be said that there is a kind of feedback loop mechanism between the developments of the HST interdisciplinary fields and the transpiring of the transhumanism and posthumanism ideas.

We have briefly examined the definitions of transhumanism and posthumanism, as well as their interdisciplinary foundation. As a result of this examination we can come to the following conclusions:

- Post- and transhumanism is inherently interdisciplinary
- Though both soft and hard sciences contribute to the interdisciplinary nature of the two terms, there is reason to believe that the involvement and role of HSS interdisciplinary disciplines has been slowly decreasing over time.

- The ongoing crisis in the humanities is interlinked and maybe be interdependent on the development of post- and transhumanist approaches. Further analysis of these two terms and the state of interdisciplinary HSS disciplines could help to better understand and develop both trans- and posthumanism, as well as the prospects of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary development of HSS.

The content and conclusion of this article are intended to serve the purpose of facilitating in the search of the development of the HSS and trans- and posthumanism movements in a direction that will safeguard against the more pessimistic forecasts for the future. The article can serve as a basis for further discussions and research on this topic.

References

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