POSTHUMAN AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT: ANTHROPOLOGY OF TRANSHUMANISM IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTMODERNITY

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Abstract

This article explores the anthropological foundations of transhumanism through the lens of postmodern philosophy. It focuses on the critical rethinking of human nature in the age of convergent technologies and highlights the posthuman as a hybrid construct emerging at the intersection of biotechnological advancement and philosophical deconstruction. Drawing on the ideas of Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, and Jean-François Lyotard, the study analyzes the shift from essentialist views of human identity to flexible and technologized models of subjectivity. Special attention is paid to the ethical and socio-cultural risks associated with morphological freedom, cognitive enhancement, and the erosion of traditional notions of dignity and autonomy. The article employs a comparative analysis of poststructuralist and transhumanist discourses to reveal the contradictions and potentials of the posthuman project.

Keywords: Posthumanism, transhumanism, postmodernism, philosophical anthropology, morphological freedom, identity, ethics of technology, deconstruction, convergent technologies, subjectivity.

Introduction

The emergence of transhumanism as both a philosophical orientation and cultural phenomenon signals a profound shift in how human nature, identity, and potential are conceptualized in the twenty-first century. Rooted in the promises of convergent technologies—such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science (NBIC)—transhumanism advocates for the

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enhancement of human capacities beyond their biological limitations. Simultaneously, postmodern philosophy challenges the essentialist assumptions embedded in Enlightenment humanism, offering a critical framework through which the very category of the "human" is destabilized and reimagined.

This article investigates the anthropological implications of transhumanism through the lens of posthumanist critique, treating the posthuman not merely as a technological construct or futuristic abstraction, but as a discursive figure situated at the intersection of philosophical deconstruction and techno-scientific innovation. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, and Jean-François Lyotard, the study explores how transhumanist aspirations to optimize and enhance the human condition interact with poststructuralist efforts to decenter and fragment the human subject.

Rather than placing these two positions in binary opposition, the article demonstrates that both posthumanism and transhumanism engage in a reconfiguration of anthropological models, though they diverge significantly in their ontological, ethical, and epistemological commitments. While one seeks to overcome the human through philosophical rupture, the other aims to extend it through technological continuity.

The posthuman condition emerges at the convergence of philosophical critique and technological evolution. As both a discursive formation and an ontological shift, the posthuman challenges classical anthropological assumptions about human essence, autonomy, and embodiment. Transhumanism, while often grounded in Enlightenment rationalism and techno-optimism, shares with posthumanist thought a desire to transcend the given limits of the human—though through fundamentally different epistemological and ethical frameworks.

The philosophical foundation of posthumanism lies in its critical disengagement from classical humanism, which historically centered the autonomous, rational, and universal subject as the measure of all things. Enlightenment humanism, while influential in shaping liberal democratic ideals, is increasingly viewed by poststructuralist thinkers as epistemologically limited and ideologically saturated with assumptions of anthropocentrism, essentialism, and exclusion.

Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), famously questioned the legitimacy of "grand narratives" that underpinned the

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Enlightenment project—among them the narrative of human progress, reason, and mastery[1]. By rejecting metanarratives as instruments of epistemic control, Lyotard initiated a broader philosophical turn toward fragmentation, pluralism, and contingency. These intellectual moves set the stage for a redefinition of subjectivity that no longer relies on fixed categories such as "man," "reason," or "nature."

Building on this, posthumanist scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles argue that the posthuman subject emerges from the erosion of boundaries between the human and the technological. In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), Hayles frames the posthuman not as a literal robot or cyborg, but as a pattern-based, informational entity—an "embodied virtuality"—whose identity is no longer grounded in stable embodiment or Cartesian dualism[2]. This conceptual shift undermines the modernist opposition between mind and body, nature and culture, human and machine.

Rosi Braidotti expands this critique by positioning the posthuman as an affirmative, relational subjectivity oriented toward becoming rather than being. In her work *The Posthuman* (2013), she challenges the binary logic of the humanist subject and advocates for a "nomadic" ontology—one that embraces multiplicity, hybridity, and transversality across species, systems, and disciplines[3]. For Braidotti, the posthuman condition is not a dystopian loss of humanity but an ethical opportunity to reframe subjectivity beyond the individualistic and anthropocentric frame.

Together, these thinkers dismantle the foundational pillars of humanist anthropology and propose a radically decentered, technologically mediated model of subjectivity. Posthumanism thus marks a paradigm shift: the human is no longer conceived as a singular, coherent essence but as an assemblage of flows, codes, and interfaces, constantly negotiated through cultural and technological contexts.

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[1] Lyotard J.-F. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. — Reprint ed. — Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. — 110 p. — (Theory and History of Literature; vol. 10). — ISBN 0-8166-1173-4.
[2] Hayles N. K. How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. – 350 p.
[3] Braidotti R. The Posthuman. – Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013. – 272 p.

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This redefinition of the human opens a conceptual space in which the aspirations of transhumanism—enhancement, optimization, and the transcendence of biological constraints—appear both as a continuation and a distortion of posthumanist logic. To explore this tension, we now turn to the transhumanist ideal and its underlying anthropological assumptions.

In contrast to posthumanist critiques that seek to deconstruct the humanist subject, transhumanism presents itself as a continuation—and in many ways, a radicalization—of Enlightenment ideals. Rooted in liberal humanism and techno-optimism, transhumanist philosophy advocates for the enhancement of human capacities through the use of advanced technologies. Its central premise is that human nature is not fixed but malleable, and that it is both possible and desirable to improve it through scientific intervention.

Key transhumanist thinkers such as Nick Bostrom and Max More argue for the right to self-modify—an idea encapsulated in the concept of *morphological freedom*. This principle supports the use of biotechnology, neuroenhancement, and artificial intelligence to transcend the limitations imposed by biology, including aging, disease, and even mortality itself (More, 2013; Bostrom, 2005)[4]. Rather than abandoning the category of the "human," transhumanism seeks to perfect it, projecting a linear trajectory from Homo sapiens to "posthuman" forms enhanced by convergent technologies.

However, the anthropological framework underlying transhumanism is not without contradictions. While it affirms individual autonomy and personal choice, it often presupposes a normative model of subjectivity—rational, self-interested, productivity-oriented—that reflects neoliberal and technocratic values. Critics have pointed out that this vision tends to reproduce social and economic inequalities by privileging access to enhancement technologies among

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[4] More M. The Philosophy of Transhumanism // More M., Vita-More N. (eds.). The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future. – Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. – P. 3–17; Bostrom N. In Defense of Posthuman Dignity // Bioethics. – 2005. – Vol. 19, No. 3. – P. 202–214.

already advantaged groups (Fukuyama, 2002; Coeckelbergh, 2013)[5]. The transhumanist future, despite its rhetoric of liberation, risks becoming a technocratic utopia available only to a global elite.

Moreover, from a postmodern philosophical perspective, transhumanism appears to reaffirm the very assumptions that posthumanism deconstructs. The transhuman subject remains embedded in an instrumental logic of control, mastery, and progress—a modernist metaphysics that views the body as a tool to be optimized rather than a lived, situated experience. In this sense, transhumanism extends, rather than transcends, the Cartesian dualisms and Enlightenment anthropocentrism critiqued by posthumanist thought.

This ambivalence reveals a deeper epistemological rift between transhumanist enhancement and posthumanist becoming. To better understand the stakes of this divergence, it is necessary to examine the ethical and cultural dimensions that arise from the transformation of the human condition in the context of convergent technologies.

The transformation of human identity under the influence of advanced technologies raises a series of pressing ethical and cultural questions. As transhumanist visions of enhancement and optimization gain traction, long-standing concepts such as personal autonomy, dignity, and moral responsibility are increasingly brought into tension with emerging forms of technological agency and control.

At the core of this ethical debate is the principle of *morphological freedom*—the right of individuals to alter their physical or cognitive capacities through technological means. While often celebrated as an extension of personal liberty, this freedom introduces complex moral dilemmas. Critics argue that unregulated enhancement could erode shared social norms and further entrench systemic inequalities, as only those with economic privilege may benefit from cutting-edge interventions. Furthermore, the commodification of the body risks reducing

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[5] Fukuyama F. Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution. – New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. – 256 p; Coeckelbergh M. Human Being @ Risk: Enhancement, Technology, and the Evaluation of Vulnerability Transformations. – Dordrecht: Springer, 2013. – 218 p.

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identity to a customizable product, undermining notions of inherent worth and common humanity (Sorgner, 2010; Coeckelbergh, 2013)[6].

The challenges extend beyond individual ethics into the realm of collective responsibility. Technologies such as neuroengineering, brain-computer interfaces, and algorithmic decision-making raise questions about agency and accountability. When cognition is enhanced or supplemented by machines, who is responsible for the outcomes—human, machine, or both? These ambiguities demand the development of new ethical frameworks that are sensitive to the hybrid nature of technologically mediated subjectivity.

Rosi Braidotti responds to these concerns by proposing an ethics grounded not in human exceptionalism but in *zoe-centered egalitarianism*—a posthumanist ethic that emphasizes the interdependence of all forms of life and resists anthropocentric hierarchies. Rather than privileging the human as the moral center of the universe, Braidotti calls for an ontological shift toward relationality, embeddedness, and ecological responsibility (Braidotti, 2013)[7]. This move aligns with broader posthumanist efforts to construct ethical systems that account for nonhuman agency, environmental interconnectedness, and the dissolution of rigid subject-object dichotomies.

On the cultural level, representations of the posthuman proliferate across science fiction, digital media, bio-art, and popular culture. These narratives serve as both mirrors and laboratories of philosophical thought, staging scenarios in which the human is technologically remade, displaced, or multiplied. Works such as Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991)[8], the speculative films of Alex Garland (*Ex Machina, Annihilation*), and the novels of William Gibson or Margaret Atwood offer not only aesthetic visions of the posthuman, but also provoke reflection on the ethical and existential stakes of human reconfiguration.

These cultural artifacts reveal that the posthuman is not solely a scientific or philosophical abstraction but a lived and imagined reality, already shaping the

[6] Sorgner, Stefan Lorenz (2010). Beyond Humanism: Reflections on Trans-and Posthumanism. Journal of Evolution and Technology 21 (2):1-19.; Coeckelbergh M. Human Being @ Risk: Enhancement, Technology, and the Evaluation of Vulnerability Transformations. – Dordrecht: Springer, 2013. – 218 p.
[7] Braidotti R. The Posthuman. – Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013. – 272 p.
[8] Haraway, D., A Cyborg Manifesto, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 3–90, 2016.

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way individuals conceptualize embodiment, identity, and agency. In this light, the intersection of posthumanist critique and transhumanist ambition emerges as a contested yet generative space for rethinking the future of human anthropology.

The convergence of transhumanist ambition and posthumanist critique reveals a fundamental reorientation in contemporary philosophical anthropology. While transhumanism envisions a future in which the human is technologically enhanced, posthumanism questions the very coherence and stability of the human as a category. Together, these discourses compel a rethinking of identity, embodiment, and ethical agency in ways that both intersect and conflict.

This article has demonstrated that posthumanism, informed by thinkers such as Lyotard, Hayles, and Braidotti, deconstructs the essentialist and anthropocentric assumptions of Enlightenment humanism, offering in their place a plural, relational, and technologically mediated subjectivity. Transhumanism, in contrast, tends to preserve the modernist ideals of control, mastery, and optimization, even as it extends the boundaries of the human condition.

The tension between these frameworks highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the posthuman—not merely as a product of biotechnological innovation but as a philosophical and cultural construct embedded in broader epistemological transformations. As technological capabilities expand, the stakes of anthropological reflection grow ever more urgent. Questions of dignity, access, and relational ethics must be addressed not only within bioethics or science policy, but also within the deeper ontological inquiries posed by posthumanist thought.

In this context, the posthuman becomes less a destination than a conceptual lens through which we can critically evaluate the shifting boundaries of the self, the body, and the social. By engaging the philosophical anthropology of the posthuman, this study contributes to an ongoing effort to theorize human existence in an age increasingly defined by technological co-evolution, epistemic pluralism, and ontological hybridity.

Future research must continue to interrogate the normative assumptions embedded in both post- and transhumanist visions, while also seeking interdisciplinary frameworks capable of addressing the ethical, cultural, and existential implications of humanity's technological reconfiguration.

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