Transhumanism in the context of Ethos of enhancement and search for Identity: philosophical origins

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the problem of transhumanism in the context of the ethics of enhancement. It is noted that modern experiments on the transformation of human identity, the improvement of physical and intellectual capabilities of a person with the help of modern biotechnologies are just a modification of old idea of self-transcendence, which has always worried humanity. Pre-philosophical versions of human improvement within mythology outlined the horizon of the ethos of enhancement, its main directions. They consisted in ritual attempts to go beyond the constants of human identity: mortality, division into two sexes and intelligence. Accordingly, the foundations were laid for future directions of intellectual thought that comprehend these constants: immortalism, transgenderism and the philosophy of artificial intelligence. It is proved that within the classical tradition of philosophy there are three paradigms (cosmocentric, theocentric and anthropocentric), which, despite their individual characteristics, are based on the common idea of representation and the metaphysical opposition of essence and existence, which must be removed in the eschatological perspective of the "end of history". In the non-classical tradition, metaphysical ideas of essence and representation are denied, and a new constructivist paradigm is put forward, which becomes the basis for the ethos of enhancement in general and the project of transhumanism in particular. At the same time, the article expresses concern that the constructivist non-classical paradigm, taken as the foundation for the ethical examination of transhumanism, contains significantly more existential risks than the classical representative one.

Introduction

Transhumanism is a philosophical and socio-political progressive movement that advocates the use of technology to enhance and radically transform human identity with the ultimate goal of creating a "post-human" and "post-humanity". According to theorists of transhumanism (N. Bostrom, A. Porter, M. More), the "post-human" is a moral ideal and the goal of human historical progress, a creature that is so radically different in terms of physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities from current people that it is no longer can be called a human person.

The purpose of the article. It is necessary to look at the genesis of the idea of transhumanism in the spiritual history of mankind. The purpose of the article is to carry out an ethical analysis of transhumanism in the context of the idea of moral improvement of a person and the search for self-identity.

Research methods

The conceptual and methodological basis of the study of the moral challenges of transhumanism is the direction in ethics, which is called "ethics of enhancement". The main questions of this ethics, according to Allen Buchanan, are as follows. Is it morally acceptable in a liberal democratic society to conduct transhumanist experiments to improve human nature? Should we consider biomedical enhancement as a mode of human enhancement in general? To what extent can we interfere with human nature in search of a new identity? Should society organize public debates and discussions about the benefits and risks of such biomedical technologies, and in what form should they take place? What political institutions and mechanisms should be created to regulate the challenges of transhumanist improvement? (*Buchanan, 2011*).

Nowadays, in ethical and bioethical discourses, there is an active debate between technoprogressives (N. Agar, A. Buchanan, J. Harris, M. More) and bioconservatives (F. Fukuyama, Y. Habermas, M. Sendel, L. Kass) in relation to the social status of transhumanist experiences, their moral legitimacy, expediency of intervention in human nature, etc. The modern German philosopher J. Habermas notes that the project of creating a new post-human, where thanks to the application of genetic technologies we change human identity, revives the old concept of "eugenics" (*Habermas, 2003*). However, if Hitler's eugenics was authoritarian, because it involved central state planning and strict ideological control of society, now is the time for the methods of "liberal eugenics", which enables to improve human nature, relying on our individual free choice

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and individual responsibility in the search for a new human identity. At the same time, as Habermas notes, eugenics, even in its liberal version, will highly likely negatively affect the self-identification of man as a species and change his moral consciousness. Knowing about the programming of our genetics will affect our self-awareness as free and morally equal beings. There is a risk that a person will cease to be aware of himself as a free subject and as the "author of his own life" (*Habermas, 2003*).

My personal position in assessing transhumanism as a problem of the ethics of improvement is as follows. Without absolutizing the extremes of the conceptual and methodological approaches of bioprogressives and bioconservatives, we can say that the "ethos of enhancement" as a universal way of moral human existence has always existed. The transhumanist project is only one of the possible cultural and historical manifestations of this "ethos of enhancement" at the current stage of human development. The idea of improving the physical and intellectual capabilities of a person with the help of biotechnology is, in fact, one of the modifications of self-transcendence, that is, self-improvement, self-outgrowth by a person of himself, rejection of his old identity and movement towards a new identity. The task of philosophy and philosophical ethics, in my opinion, is to reflect the conditions for the realization of self-transcendence in all its modifications. Relying on what conceptual and methodological framework should we conduct transhumanist experiments on human transformation? Shall we base ethics of enhancement on classical metaphysical paradigm or on 'post-metaphysical' (Heidegger, Habermas) one? It is obvious that without understanding the worldview and philosophical foundations of self-transcendence in general, we will not be able to carry out an adequate philosophical analysis of the transhumanist project.

Results and Discussion

Self-transcendence as a virtue and moral duty. First of all, we need to define that self-transcendence means "extension of consciousness" (K.G. Jung) for qualitative personal transformation and self-actualization, going beyond the constants of biological (instinctive) existence, taming one's own nature with the help of culture. Here we may refer to M. Scheler, who describes human existence with the help of two concepts "life" and "spirit" (Scheler, 1960). Life is the sphere of human instincts, urges, sensations and emotions. The spirit is the ability to self-restraint and self-mastery of the natural realm. Life seeks to expand and satisfy the biological needs of the body; the spirit seeks asceticism. Life expands its power in material time and space. The spirit, which is weak and feeble by the standards of life, is directed to the eternal and absolute. Self-transcendence signifies the fundamental feature of human existence as a spiritual being: freedom of will, striving for the perfection. In turn, this moral ideal of perfection is the core of a person's identity. It can be described in terms of humanistic psychology as "ideal self" (*Rogers, 1961*) – what a person most evaluates and wants to get, what a person strives to become as a result of the realization of his own potential "real self". Thus, self-transcendence is the process of "spiritualizing life" in the light of the ideal self. Self-transcendence can be considered as a moral virtue and a moral duty of every person to self-actualization in the direction of a "fully functioning personality" (*Rogers, 1961*).

Pre-philosophical modes of self-transcendence within the myth. Historically, the first attempt to put the problem of self-transcendence was made within the framework of a mythological worldview. Mircea Eliade notes that any myth explains why man became what he is: mortal, divided into two sexes, an intelligent being different from animals (*Eliade, 1963*). Thus, the myth outlines the constants of human identity. At the same time, the myth shows that these constants can be overcome. Mythological culture responds to the challenge of mortality with the ideas of animism and immortality of the soul. Moreover, in some mythological and religious systems there is not only the immortality of the soul, but also the immortality of the body (for example, initiation rites in shamanism, during which the adept dies and is resurrected, spiritual practices of Taoism to achieve physical immortality, and so on).

The next constant of human identity is the division into two sexes: male and female. This constant can also be overridden. Mythology gives us examples of the primordial state of man in the form of a sexless or bisexual creature, primordial ancestor (androgynous, hermaphrodite). The mythologies of various peoples also tell about the possibility of returning to this primordial state as a result of ritual practices of body modification: sex change (travesties), ritual castration, ritual imitation of an androgynous man (ritual sub incision of penis among the Aborigines).

And, finally, the myth demonstrates that intelligence as a constant of human identity can also be transcended with the help of ritual practices of ecstasy, trance, and madness. The myth shows that common sense (everyday sensory experience) is only one mode of human thinking. On the contrary, real authentic existence begins when a person experiences an extraordinary, "transpersonal experience" of going beyond oneself (*Morozov et al., 2021*).

Therefore, within the limits of mythological thinking, a person appears as a being that is called to transcend certain features and properties of his nature. The ancient mythological practices remind us of the modern theories and practices of transhumanists, who also "encroach" on the traditional constants of human identity, canceling their necessity, don`t they? After all, the project of transhumanism, at least in its intentions, intends to carry out the same process of transcendence of the old identity as well as the myth, but on a new level of scientific and technological progress: to make gender division not a necessary fact, but a subject of free choice (transgenderism), to replace natural intelligence with a more powerful machine super-intelligence (the philosophy of artificial intelligence), to overcome death and achieve immortality (immortalism).

The ethos of enhancement in the cosmocentrist paradigm. Now we will consider the peculiarities of the ethics of enhancement within the classical tradition of philosophizing, in which three paradigms can be distinguished: cosmocentrism, theocentrism, and anthropocentrism. Each of these three paradigms offers its own ethos of enhancement, which can be considered a kind of prototype of the modern transhumanist project of human improvement. We call them prototypes, because although the emphasis here is mainly on spiritual practices (techniques) of self-improvement, the intentions embedded in them are realized in transhumanism already at the modern material and technical level in accordance with the materialistic character of contemporary civilization.

Ancient Greek philosophy, the first European philosophy to replace myth, works within the cosmocentric paradigm. It problematized the concept of self-improvement, interpreted it as a person's moral duty to reveal the potential

of human nature. A person must become a person through upbringing, education, self-development, cultivation and practice of moral virtues. Hence the call "to know oneself", one's own nature is a fundamental moral virtue in doctrines of Socrates, Aristotle, and others Greek thinkers.

At the same time, the moral imperative "know yourself" necessarily presupposes the existence of a "self", an objective human nature, an essence, a "divine" absolute truth (logos) that can be known and reproduced in the mind. The Greeks and later classical philosophical tradition work within the framework of the correspondence theory of truth and even more broadly within the framework of the logocentric representational paradigm of knowledge (knowledge as a representation of being as objective reality). Accordingly, the entire ancient ethic of enhancement is based upon this paradigm. Having learned one`s own objective nature or essence, realizing ourselves as microcosms in the great macrocosm of order, harmony and beauty, we make conscious efforts to new spiritual birth (revealing and manifesting our inner essence). The objective a priori innate "self" is the foundation for self-identity. Therefore, for the Greek culture the formation of a person, his spiritual and physical transformation is the process of revealing the inner nature, the exit from the hidden into the non-hidden, open. In fact, transcendence coincides with the meaning of nature as "aletheia", that Greeks understood as truth, openness, uncovering (*Heidegger, 2018*).

It should be emphasized that the cosmocentrism of the Greeks imposed certain limits on self-understanding and self-improvement. The individual, striving for the divine ideal, could not go beyond the boundaries of individual human nature (his own "form" in the Aristotelian sense). No wonder Pythagoras taught that wisdom is available to the gods. People can only love wisdom, strive for it through the study of philosophy. So the distance still remains between heaven and earth, gods and mortals, which Heidegger described in his "foursome of being" (*Heidegger, 1977*), the mysterious interplay of ontological powers of being. Man remains a hostage to his own human nature.

The ethos of enhancement in the theocentric paradigm. Christian culture brought a new understanding of perfection as theosis (deification): "God became man so that man could become god" (St. Athanasius of Alexandria). The ideas of the dual nature of Jesus Christ and synergy (the cooperation of the will of man and the will of God) shifted the emphasis of the entire ethics of enhancement. Cosmocentrism was replaced by theocentrism - the idea of God, which is transcendental to the nature created by Him. Moreover, a person ("hypostasis") according to Christian doctrine is something that goes beyond human nature. A personality created by the image and likeness of God, can in the process of improvement go beyond the boundaries of nature, towards the realm of the supernatural, the divine. A prominent English theologian, archbishop Rowan Williams notes: "The greatest delusion is the inclusion of a person in the natural order, the reduction of personal uniqueness and unrepeatability to merely an individual, a single case of a general set of laws and characteristics, a separate example of one or another general type of being. In Christian understanding person is created according to the way of life of St. Trinity ... The fulfilment of a unique personality consists in the relationship to the Other and self-giving in 'ecstasy' and 'kenosis' (self-restriction). Selfish individuality can be transformed by grace into a truly personal life – the one in communion with God" (*Williams, 1975*).

It is important to emphasize that theocentrism in no way diminishes the importance and significance of a person.

On the contrary, man is interpreted as the pinnacle of creation. Therefore, Christian culture is a 'theocentric type of humanism' (J. Maritain). The ethos of self-improvement in Christian optics unfolds in the horizon of the supernatural realm. The basis of personal identity is not nature, but God as a person who transcends nature. In the eschatological perspective, the alienation between God and man must be finally overcome (mystical doctrine of "apokatastasis" or universal restoration). From a personal perspective, such alienation is overcome in a state of holiness. As Nazip Khamitov notes, holiness is a phenomenon of the ultimate being of a person, "the highest manifestation of spirituality when it is combined with soulfulness". On one hand, holiness is self-sacrifice in the service of an idea, and on the other hand, it is a manifestation of altruism and love-mercy towards people and the world as a whole. "Holiness combines spirit and matter. It removes their tragic opposition". (*Khamitov, Krylova, 2009*). Christian moral philosophy raises issues not only of spiritual self-improvement through repentance and "metanoia" (which literary means "change of mind") and holiness, but also of bodily transformation. However, such a perspective is transferred to the end of history, after the resurrection of all people in a new perfect body free from passions, decay and death. St. Paul, describing the resurrection of Christ and the expected universal resurrection of all people, talks about the resurrected body – "soma pneumatikon", its supernatural properties. Comparing the perfect resurrected body with an ordinary body made of flesh and blood, the apostle notes: "But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. … The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body". (*1 Cor. 15: 35-43*).

The ethos of enhancement in the anthropocentric paradigm. The culture of the Renaissance and the New Age rationalized and "disenchanted" (M. Weber) the world, although it could not completely break away from the previous heritage of the religious culture of the Middle Ages. In the culture of anthropocentric humanism, a secular version of the Christian conception of God-man – "overman" emerges. It is interpreted as the pinnacle of history, the result of scientific and technical progress and the mastery of nature. To put it in the terms of K. Rogers, the superman is the "ideal self", a reference point and a universal moral ideal for individual`s self-identification within the anthropocentric cultural paradigm. A superman is a being who has overcome the self-determination of his own nature and achieved self-transcendence. We mean here the qualitative transformation of a person: physiological, moral and social. Modifications of overman (in a broad sense) can be the all-powerful "man-titan" (Renaissance), "outstanding personality" (K. Marx), "genius" (K. Helvetius, J. Goethe), "overman" (in a narrow sense used by F. Nietzsche).

A bright representative of anthropocentric humanism was Claude Helvetius. In the work "On Man, His Mental Abilities and His Education", denying the presence of innate abilities in people, Helvetius argued that a person is exclusively a product of the social environment and labor. Constant upbringing, passion and luck (chance) are three factors that can create an genius overman. "Upbringing

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makes us what we are... People's minds and talents are always products of their aspirations..." (*Helvetius, 2019*). "If there is an art to arouse strong passions, if there are easy means of filling a young man's memory with certain ideas and objects, then surely there are means of creating geniuses" (*Helvetius, 2019*). In general, while in the theocentric paradigm the ideal of a person's ultimate existence is holiness as the highest manifestation of the synthesis of soul and spirituality, then in the anthropocentric paradigm genius is undoubtedly put first. Genius is proclaimed to be the highest manifestation of creative abilities and self-development of the individual, the goal of human history. According to N. Khamitov, a genius, solving the contradictions of the local and universal, tries to go beyond the simple creation of works of art, because "he gravitates to a special type of activity - to myth-making, which ... exerts a special influence on the meaningful values of humanity" (*Khamitov, Krylova, 2009*).

The crown of the anthropocentric paradigm and at the same time the beginning of the non-classical tradition of philosophizing is the nihilistic philosophy of Nietzsche, for whom a person is something that must be overcome, a bridge or transition. "I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?... All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood, and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is ape to man? A laughing stock or painful embarrassment! And man shall be that to overman: a laughingstock or painful embarrassment.... The overman is the meaning of the earth.... Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman - a rope over an abyss ... what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end." (*Nietzsche, 2012*). The overman takes the place of the "dead god". The goal of the overman is the realization of the will to power, the acquisition of freedom beyond morality. "For Nietzsche ordinary people of today are the initial material, manure, which is necessary in order to create fertile soil for the cultivation of the superman" (*Antonova, 2005*). At the same time, due to the fact that a overman frees himself from the dictates of mass consciousness, discards existing values, "society pays for this with hatred, isolation, and calls such a superman a criminal" (*Antonova, 2005*).

Undoubtedly, both the theocentric and anthropocentric versions of humanism became important milestones in the history of the ethics of enhancement and humanity's search for its own identity, and also laid the foundation for the emergence of transhumanism.

The ethos of enhancement within the non-classical tradition of philosophizing

Post-Nietzschean philosophy laid the foundations of a new, non-classical paradigm of philosophizing, where the problem of self-transcendence and superman sounds differently`. In the XX century culture the echoes of the Nietzsche`s moral position can be traced in various teachings. In atheistic existentialism, the vivid representative of which is J.-P. Sartre, man appears as an ambitious "project of himself" without a given a priori essence. For Sartre, "essence precedes existence", which essentially means that the essence of man is his existence (*Sartre, 2007*). However, Heidegger notes that such a reversal of the old metaphysical thesis still remains a metaphysical thesis (*Heidegger, 1977*). Alister Crowley's occultism continues the nihilistic line started by Nietzsche and postulates a moral imperative: "do whatever you will and that shall be the whole of the law." (*Crowley, 1976*). In postmodern uto-pian projects of the future, the idea of transforming the human body into a "body without organs" is put forward - a rhizomorphic formation, a formless, a-structural whole capable of self-organization, spontaneous self-configuration, and self-construction. The body in postmodern culture ceases to be a "destiny" - it is a material that needs further improvement. In the work of the well-known representative of postmodernism, J. Deleuze, man appears as a free and anonymous singularity capable of "transgression", going beyond the limits of the possibilities of one's own human nature into the impossible (*Deleuze, 1990*).

In general, the non-classical tradition of philosophizing that root back to Nietzsche rejects the traditional oppositions such as essence-phenomenon, real-illusory as false metaphysical narratives. Nature, essence, objectively reality, truth do not exist, or inaccessible to our comprehension. Non-classical philosophy criticizes the concept of representativism (knowledge as a reflection, the mind as a 'mirror of nature'), and puts forward a new methodological principle of constructivism (E. Glasersfeld, T. Rockmar). The roots of constructivism go back to the philosophy of I. Kant and A. Schopenhauer. The essence of this teaching is that the subject in his cognition does not reflect the objective world, objective truth, essence, or more broadly - some ontological reality, but actively constructs its own model of interpretation of the world. Knowledge is the result of active construction by the subject based on his own experience (*Glasersfeld, 2001*). So, the leading idea of constructivism is that a person is a creative being who produces knowledge about himself and constructs himself, his own identity. Within the non-classical tradition of philosophizing, constructivism can be considered as a conceptual and methodological basis for transhumanism.

Conclusion

Positive or negative evaluation of transhumanism, analysis of its advantages and disadvantages depends on which philosophical tradition we work in, and which conceptual and methodological principles we take as a basis. In my opinion, the classical tradition of philosophizing, based on the ideas of the correspondence theory of truth and knowledge as a representation, is more reliable in the sense of the foundation for ethical expertise of the direction and results of transhumanist experiments. Different paradigms can exist within the classical tradition: cosmocentrism, theocentrism, and anthropocentrism. In spite of the differences, the general existential situation of a person, considered through the prism of the classical tradition, consists in ambivalence, non-self-identity, alienation of a person from himself. Human existence is alienated from its essence, the being - from its proper state. Self-transcendence means overcoming alienation, its "removal". Such removal of contradictions can be understood as an individual meaning of existence, as well as a meaning of the socio-historical process. In the latter case, it is transferred to the eschatological perspective, to the end of history. Accordingly, the ultimate goal of individual existence or history as a whole is the event when the actual human existence (unreal, incomplete, imperfect) obtains final completeness and perfection. If we apply this approach to the transhumanism, then the 'post-human' appears to be the goal of human history, the removal of all the contradictions of human existence.

If we base our analysis upon the concepts of "human essence", "human nature", and "objective truth", then we have certain limits beyond which we cannot go, and which will protect us from rash steps in transhumanist experi-

ments. For example, knowing the objective nature of a person, his essential structures, we will at the same time understand what will contradict them, what will be unnatural, and therefore undesirable from a moral point of view.

Within the non-classical tradition of philosophizing (atheistic existentialism, postmodernism), the transhumanist project has much more risks and challenges. If we construct our knowledge about the world, and not reflect it, if we only care about the consistency and non-contradiction of different theories (for example, the theory of transhumanism and the theory of liberal democracy), but at the same time we deny the concepts of essence, nature, truth, objective world, universal values, man as "relics of metaphysics", then we have much more freedom of action, but at the same time more dangers. Therefore, there will be a high probability that the development of the transhumanist project of transformation of human identity will follow a pessimistic scenario, through the destruction of the human in man, which will potentially lead to the extinction of man as a biological species (*Bostrom, 2014*).

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У статті проблема трансгуманізму розглядається в контексті етики вдосконалення. Зазначається, що сучасні експерименти по трансформації людської ідентичності, покращення фізичних і інтелектуальних можливостей людини за допомогою сучасних біотехнологій – всього лише модифікація одвічної ідеї самотрансценденції, що завжди бентежила людство. Дофілософські версії покращення людини в межах міфології окреслили горизонт етосу вдосконалення і полягали у ритуальних спробах виходу за межі констант людського існування: смертності, поділу на дві статі та розумності. Відповідно, були закладені основи для майбутніх напрямків інтелектуальної думки, що осмислюють ці константи: іммортилізм, трансгендеризм та філософія штучного інтелекту. Доводиться, що в межах класичної традиції філософії існували три парадигми (космоцентрична, теоцентрична і антропоцентрична), які, попри індивідуальні особливості, ґрунтувалися на спільній ідеї репрезентації та метафізичній опозиції сутності й існування, що повинна бути знята в есхатологічній перспективі «кінця історії». У некласичній традиції заперечуються метафізичні ідеї сутності та репрезентації, і висувається нова конструктивістська парадигма, що стає основою для етосу вдосконалення взагалі і проєкту трансгуманізму зокрема. Водночас, у статті висловлюється побоювання, що конструктивістська некласична парадигма як фундамент етичної експертизи трансгуманізму, містить значно більше екзистенційних ризиків, аніж класична репрезентативна.

Ключові слова: трансгуманізм, етос вдосконалення, ідентичність, самотрансценденція як чеснота, космоцентризм, теоцентризм, антропоцентризм, конструктивізм.