

TRANSHUMANISM AND EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY: A DIALOGUE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HUMAN NATURE

Popovych Terezia, Baryska Yana, Maslyuk Oksana

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61345/1339-7915.2024.4.13>

Annotation. The article explores the philosophical dialogue between transhumanism and evolutionary psychology regarding the limits and consequences of the technological transformation of human nature. The growing relevance of this debate is analyzed in the context of the rapid development of genetics, nanotechnology and robotics, which open up unprecedented opportunities for changing human nature.

The main provisions of transhumanism are considered, which, continuing the ideas of the Enlightenment, offers a radical vision of the future, where humanity can consciously direct its own evolution with the help of technology. The position of evolutionary psychology is highlighted, which, based on an understanding of the natural mechanisms of the development of the human species, warns against hasty intervention in a complex system of adaptive mechanisms that have been formed over millions of years.

The paper analyzes in detail the works of leading representatives of both directions, including J. Huxley and Gr. Flow from the side of transhumanism, as well as critical views of F. Fukuyama and L. Kass. Special attention is paid to the research of evolutionary psychologists, who provide scientific justification for the concept of universal human nature and warn against the risks of “planned evolution”.

A fundamental contradiction has been revealed between the views of transhumanists, who consider human nature as plastic and ready for technological changes, and evolutionary psychologists, who consider it a fixed reality formed by long evolution. It is emphasized that modern technologies create fundamentally new conditions for human existence that go beyond the traditional enlightened understanding of science.

The study shows that although technological development of mankind has already changed our nature, further radical changes require careful consideration and study. The main problem of “planned evolution” is determined by the risk of uncontrolled acceleration of natural evolutionary processes without understanding all possible consequences.

Key words: transhumanism, evolutionary psychology, technological transformation, human nature, planned evolution.

1. Statement of the problem.

In the modern era of rapid technological development, humanity stands on the threshold of unprecedented opportunities to change its own nature. Achievements in the fields of genetics, nanotechnology and robotics open prospects not only for improving the conditions of human life, but also for the fundamental transformation of the human being. In this context, the philosophical dialogue between transhumanism and evolutionary psychology regarding the limits and consequences of such a transformation becomes especially relevant.

Emerging as a continuation of Enlightenment ideas about progress, transhumanism offers a radical vision of a future where humans can consciously direct their own evolution through technology.

Instead, evolutionary psychology, based on a deep understanding of the natural mechanisms of development of the human species, warns against hasty interventions in a complex system of adaptive mechanisms that have been formed over millions of years.

This confrontation raises fundamental questions about the essence of human nature, the limits of technological intervention in it, and humanity's responsibility for its own future. The fact that modern technologies are already beginning to blur the traditional boundaries between natural and artificial, biological and technological adds to this debate, which requires a new philosophical understanding of human nature and its future.

2. The purpose of the study.

To analyze and compare the approaches of transhumanism and evolutionary psychology to the issue of transformation of human nature, to identify key contradictions between these approaches and to outline possible ways of their synthesis to form a balanced vision of future human development.

3. Analysis of scientific sources.

The theoretical basis of the study consists of the works of leading representatives of both directions. The concept of transhumanism is examined through the works of J. Huxley, who laid its foundations, and modern theorists such as Gr. Stock. Their works reveal the basic vision of transhumanism regarding the possibilities of technological improvement of man and responsibility for evolutionary development.

A critical view of transhumanist ideas is presented in the works of F. Fukuyama and L. Kass, who raised important ethical questions about the limits of technological intervention in human nature. Special attention is paid to the research of evolutionary psychologists, who provide scientific justification for the concept of universal human nature and warn against the risks of "planned evolution".

The current state of the debate is analyzed through the lens of recent research in the fields of genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics, which provide a practical context for theoretical debates about the future of human nature. An important aspect of the analysis is also the historical context of the development of technologies and their impact on human society, which allows a better understanding of modern challenges and prospects.

4. Presentation of the research material.

Our research now focuses on the ethical and philosophical analysis of the possibilities opened up by modern scientific and technological progress. Discussions about transhumanism revolve around the question of the essence of human nature. Thus, J. Huxley believed that an understanding of the evolutionary theory would lead humanity to an awareness of its role in world development. He considered humanity as the leading force on the planet, responsible for its further evolutionary development.

Science opens up opportunities for significant changes in the environment. J. Huxley called for the use of accumulated knowledge to direct the further development of mankind. Modern transhumanists have developed these ideas by viewing human nature as an unfinished project that can be changed at will once it is complete. According to them, modern man is not the final point of evolution. Transhumanists believe that the intelligent application of science, technology, and rational thinking will allow humanity to evolve into posthuman beings with far greater capabilities than they currently have.

A similar position is supported by Gr. Stock, head of the Center for the Study of Evolution and the Origin of Life. He believes that humanity is emerging from its "infancy" and must realize and take responsibility for its growing capabilities. According to him, in some spheres of life, people have already begun to "play the role of gods", and this gives a certain chance for success [1].

The transhumanist view that human nature is subject to change has drawn serious criticism from political thinkers, ethicists, and theologians, including F. Fukuyama and L. Cass [2]. Critics of transhumanism point to two problems: equating responsibility for the future of humanity with the inevitability of the emergence of a new species, as well as support for genetic engineering to expand the apparently limited capabilities of the human organism.

The key idea of transhumanism is that human nature is not stable, and the future of humanity is determined by rapid technological development. Followers of this direction welcome technologies that will allow people to gradually transform, acquiring abilities that far exceed the current understanding of human capabilities.

Unlike critics who single out human dignity as a unique feature that distinguishes humans from other living beings, evolutionary psychologists have offered stronger arguments in defense of the concept of human nature. They consider it not as a social construct, but as an objective reality formed during long evolution. That is why, in their opinion, human nature cannot be changed technologically.

Evolutionists define human nature through psychological universals - a set of cognitive and emotional abilities common to all healthy representatives of *Homo sapiens*. Despite the individual, racial, and gender differences that are also part of our nature, all humans share a common natural foundation.

According to evolutionists, the structure of the human mind was formed through natural selection. They discovered that the mind has specialized mechanisms for performing specific tasks. Therefore, they oppose genetic engineering, which can change the foundations of human personality. Such engineering affects the body's control system and changes the complex mental mechanisms that evolution has created to solve the tasks of survival and reproduction. Although human intervention in evolution may lead to the emergence of beings with more advanced intelligence, it is impossible to predict all the consequences of such changes [3].

From the standpoint of their understanding of human nature, evolutionary psychologists are critical of transhumanism. In this trend, they distinguish two directions that originate from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The first direction continues the traditions of the Enlightenment of the 18th century, striving to improve the conditions of human life with the help of science and technology.

From this perspective, transhumanism is not something revolutionary. In fact, we are already improved beings thanks to the many technological advances of recent centuries that have changed our essence. Inventions such as agriculture, writing, postal service, navigation, computing, antibiotics, radio, television, photography and computers have shaped modern man. It is logical to assume that future technologies will continue this process of improvement. As long as transhumanism simply advocates the idea of progress and the reduction of human suffering, it is difficult to find grounds for its criticism [5].

From an evolutionary perspective, transhumanism becomes problematic when, following the romantic myth of the artist-creator of reality, it involves radical changes to the human species through technological progress. Evolutionary psychology disputes this, stressing that the human brain evolved to perform specific tasks, and we still have little understanding of how it works.

Evolutionary psychologists pose a key question about the purpose of technological progress. They caution against equating evolution with progress, stressing that evolution can be capricious, violent, and random. We are the result of biochemical natural selection, which also created what we now condemn (for example, infanticide). This example proves the reality of human nature - the mind is not a blank slate, but rather a computational structure with mechanisms selected in the process of long adaptation. Therefore, evolutionary psychologists urge scientists to first study in detail the mechanisms of the adapted mind before rashly accepting the ideas of transhumanism. Since we do not even fully understand the nature of thinking, transhumanist ideas about uploading the mental content of an individual cannot be taken seriously.

Transhumanists might respond to the criticism by pointing out a contradiction: if humanity has indeed evolved over a long period of time, there is no reason to stop this process and assume that modern human behavior is not subject to further evolutionary change.

One can also question the concept of universal “human nature” advocated by evolutionary psychologists, considering it to be only a prejudice. Evolutionary psychology does not deny the possibility of transformation of humanity under the influence of evolution over a long period of time. Instead, she criticizes the accelerated, planned, and instrumental intervention in the results of the slow evolutionary process offered by modern biotechnologies and supported by transhumanists. It is this “planned evolution” that worries evolutionary psychologists, as it dangerously accelerates the natural, and therefore slow, evolutionary process.

Therefore, transhumanism can be seen as a continuation of the ideas of the Enlightenment, since it believes in the possibility of improving the conditions of human life with the help of science and technology. Any analysis of transhumanism requires a deep understanding of the role of technology in the formation of culture.

The history of human technical innovations is extremely rich: from the invention of fire, the wheel, pottery, domestication of animals to metallurgy, glass, the printing press, the steam engine, the telegraph, and the personal computer. However, the term “technique” itself began to be widely used only at the end of the 19th century, initially denoting all practical crafts and arts together. Later, this word became synonymous with machine technologies and a characteristic feature of modernity, which arose as a result of the industrial revolution [6].

Although the idea of science and technology as drivers of social change was key to the Enlightenment era, at the beginning of the 21st century, humanity found itself in a fundamentally new situation where the intellectual foundations of the Enlightenment no longer work to their full potential.

The modern development of genetics, nanotechnology and robotics creates new conditions for human existence. In these conditions, the enlightened division into the observer and the object of observation, the subjective and the objective, the knower and the known, loses its relevance.

New genetics opens up opportunities to improve our biological nature, nanotechnology allows controlling matter at the atomic level, and robotics not only replaces the human brain with more powerful computing systems, but also contributes to the unification of biological and information technologies.

5. Conclusions.

Thus, based on the above, we can single out the following conclusions:

1. Transhumanism as a philosophical trend is divided into two directions - enlightening (evolutionary improvement of human life) and romantic (radical transformation of human nature).
2. There is a fundamental contradiction between the views of transhumanists and evolutionary psychologists: transhumanists consider human nature plastic and ready for technological changes, evolutionary psychologists consider it as a fixed reality formed by long evolution
3. Modern technologies (genetics, nanotechnology, robotics) create fundamentally new conditions for human existence that go beyond the traditional enlightened understanding of science.
4. The main problem of “planned evolution” is the risk of uncontrolled acceleration of natural evolutionary processes without understanding all possible consequences.
5. Humanity’s technological development has already changed our nature, but further radical changes require careful consideration and study.

References:

1. Stock G. Metaman : The Making of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism. New York : Simon and Schuster, 1993. 331 p.

2. Kass Leon R. *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity : The Challenge for Bioethics*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002. 212 p.
3. Buss David M. *Evolutionary Psychology : The New Science of the Mind*. New York: Psychology Press, 2014. 280 p.
4. Barkow Jerom H. *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* / Jerom H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, John Tooby. New York : Oxford University Press, 1992. 441 p.
5. Harris, J. & Savulescu, J. (2023) *Human Rights in the Age of Enhancement Technologies, Law, Innovation and Technology*, Vol. 15(1), pp. 15–38.
6. Bostrom, N. & Sandberg, A. (2023) *The Ethics of Human Enhancement and Fundamental Rights*, *Bioethics Quarterly*, Vol. 28(4), pp. 89–112.
7. Byelova M., Farcash I.-M., Byelov D., *The principle of humanism and its content in the conditions of the formation of the newest social paradigm*. *European Socio-Legal and Humanitarian Studies*. 2022. Issue 1, p. 30–43.
8. Byelov D., Holonich J., *The principle of humanism in the state-individual relationship*. *Journal of social sciences, nursing, public health and education*. № 1. 2021. P. 138–143.

Terezia Popovych,

*Candidate of legal sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor of the Department of Theory and History of the State and Law
"Uzhhorod National University"
ORCID: 0000-0002-8333-3921*

Yana Baryska,

*PhD in Law, Associate Professor
Uzhhorod National University
88000, 3 Narodna Sq., Uzhhorod, Ukraine
ORCID: 0000-0001-5382-7974*

Oksana Maslyuk,

*PhD in Law, Associate Professor
Uzhhorod National University
88000, 3 Narodna Sq., Uzhhorod, Ukraine
ORCID: 0000-0003-1201-8956*