8-2017

Nietzsche’s Posthuman Imperative: On the Human, All too Human Dream of Transhumanism

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he overcomes by learning to backward-will through circular and recurring time.

6 Nietzsche uses this same metaphor of gravity when he has the dwarf whisper mockingly to Zarathustra that every stone that is thrown up must fall back down, and that Zarathustra, the philosopher's stone, has thrown himself up high but is now sentenced to being stoned by himself as he falls back down upon himself (Z: 3 “On the Vision and the Riddle” §2).

7 Seung (2005, 103, 123-124, 131, 180) conflates the intra-cyclical determinism of linear time with the trans-cyclical determinism of circular time and is therefore not able to see how Nietzsche looks to our interaction with the latter as a solution to our problems resulting from the former.

8 In an unpublished note from 1884 (KSA 11:25[7]), Nietzsche has Zarathustra spell out the compatibility of intra-cyclical novelty and trans-cyclical repetition (Loeb 2010, 17, 142; Loeb 2012).

9 As I argue in Loeb 2010, 14-16, scholars have missed this point because they have imagined that a memory of the last cycle would add something different to the next cycle. But Nietzsche's point is that the memory is acquired in every cycle, including the last cycle, and that there has never been an original, or first, cycle in which the memory was not yet acquired.

10 In Loeb 2010, 138-145, I explain how Nietzsche indicates that it is Zarathustra's disciples, and not the higher men, who are the ancestors of the superhuman in virtue of awakening their own latent knowledge of eternal recurrence.
of his glory and his inscrutability. By contrast, the God of the New Testament, the Christian god, as Nietzsche writes, presented the sorriest spectacle of all the gods: needing not honor or devotion or glorification but desperate for love and, a god, like anyone who needs love, of destitution, abjection, pity.

Today we have science. Even more than that, we have our belief or faith in science, a faith which has long since replaced the ascetic ideal corresponding to the divine compact that drove the old and new testaments. And today, we “machinists and bridge builders of the future” (BGE §14), expect to fabricate ourselves. And with all the practice we have in the invisible, in the virtual appearances that play on our computer and tablet screens and cell-phone displays, we see ourselves as no longer the beings we happen to be (human, all-too-human) but we are our machines, we are our internet connections, iPads or tablets, cellphones, little Apple watches. On Facebook, on Instagram or Twitter, texting and sharing our location automatically, triangulating our lives with and above all into the web, we are (already) transhuman. Hence we can well imagine that with an implant, be it of a chip, a lens, a titanium joint, or some time ago — before a certain scandal, with murder, made the example an awkward one — with new curved blades as legs,2 or new ears, or the new kidneys we hope (very soon) to harvest from pig-human chimeras,3 there will be no limit at all, so we imagine, to what we can be, or at least, in the ‘cloud,’ given the vistas of cyberspace, or at least given the cartographical conceits of a range of gaming domains (seemingly going back no further than Robert E. Howard or maybe J.R. Tolkien),4 it is argued there will be no limits to where we can travel or set up shop, and ‘love’ and ‘live.’

Tethered to a keyboard, tapping with squinting attention on a cell-phone screen, we proclaim ourselves limitless: scholars tell one another and any popular ear inclined to listen that human beings are (already) transhuman, (already) humanity 2.0.5 Welcome to the online, connected, networked, virtual, digital realm. Welcome to your finger on a keyboard, tapping a screen or even, although the kinks in that are not yet worked out in detail, traced, outlined in air. And we might wonder about the relationship between Minority Report’s air tracing gestures and the voice commands favored on Star Trek, do such films program our desires for technology, or anticipate them, spontaneously? And some murmur that with Siri, the “new” iPhone already — there’s that ‘already’ word again — did all this, generations ago now.

In his essay “Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism,”6 Stefan Sorgner challenges those who seek to keep a distance between the transhumanist movement and any connection with Nietzsche’s thought.

For Sorgner the danger that is anticipated here is an already foregone conclusion. And as he muses, had Nietzsche known of transhumanism, he would have been, because so Sorgner muses, he could only have been, sympathetic with the ideal. The only dissonance is a sheery mechanical one, rather to the extent that transhumanism was once named via cybernetics, and hence associated with Donna Haraway’s ‘cyborgs,’ but this dissonance seems to vanish with Ray Kurzweil’s projection of the ‘technological singularity,’ as an automatic human machine mind-meld, a becoming-machine. More exigent writers will note that Kurzweil himself simply takes over or “borrows” the language and the science fantasy assumptions of the San Diego computer scientist and science fiction writer, Vernor Vinge.7 Rather more gingerly than Kurzweil (and this is true in almost every respect), Vinge contextualizes the language of what he called “the technological singularity” as a techno-theoretical trump card, explained by the cyberneticist Vinge with reference to John von Neumann (where it should be noted that the reference to von Neumann exemplifies a fairly ecstatic conventionality that is a staple in the science fiction world, as Vinge celebrates von Neumann in his fiction as a “Dawn Age genius.”)8

The reference to a new ‘dawn’ is significant and it should be noted that founding fathers, this is what I meant by calling this a sci-fi staple, from Ray Bradbury to Clark and Asimov (and it doesn’t get more staple than that), are permitted any number of limitations because one needs them, just like a real father, for legitimacy’s sake. Here the abstract of Vinge’s 1993 lecture on the technological singularity is worth citing and it has a certain punchy quality, as abstracts go:

Within thirty years, we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence. Shortly after, the human era will be ended.9

Vinge cites Stanislaw Ulam as reporting von Neumann in conversation on

the ever accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue.10

As Vinge points out (in a parenthesis drawn from Günther Stent), von Neumann himself

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superhumanity is the essence of the Singularity. Without that we would get
a glut of technical riches, never properly absorbed ... 11

In the context of the technological singularity, including, as if for good
measure, a reference to superhumanity, Vinge’s contextualization requires
— as all insider-style comments require — a context. There are a lot of
such references on the theme of the human-superhuman continuum and I
would recommend unpacking them with the help of Günther Anders or
Peter Sloterdijk or even, to be more esoteric, Jean Baudrillard or Paul
Virilio, on one side of the tale, and of any number of more or less
triumphalist futurists on the other, I like to think of Vanevar Bush and
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Peter Sloterdijk or even, to be more esoteric, Jean Baudrillard or Paul
Hermann Kahn but it is more conventional to think of Marshall McLuhan
(it was his centennial ‘year’ in 2011) or Alvin Toffler. For his part, Vinge
whom I met in San Diego, is fond of citing Erik Drexler and the seemingly
out of touch nuclear power enthusiast (damn the radiation and all the other
details). Freeman Dyson, in addition to Marvin Minsky and others.12

Although it is my point in what follows that Nietzsche offers us a good
deal of help philosophically, it is hard to come to terms with triumphalist
futurists without going all Frankfurt school on them and the rhetoric of
Vinge’s abstract illustrates why. First you posit, as Vinge does (echoing
Ulam who was himself echoing von Neumman), the “imminent creation by
technology of entities with greater than human intelligence.” 13 Having
said that this is somehow to be done by an as yet to be unspecified
technology (Vinge, a computer scientist is himself vague here), and without
fully specifying what a ‘greater than human intelligence’ would look like
or, indeed, how we human beings with our specifiedly lesser degree of
intelligence would be able to recognize such a ‘higher’ intelligence to
begin with, today’s futurists debate the projected consequences supposed
likely.

This is a sales pitch: having invented “superhuman intelligence” (never
mind the details) the pitch continues with the declaration that “the human
era will be ended” 14 and thus one must plan accordingly. The rest is
science fiction and it’s well worth reading. In philosophy of a certain kind
the argument may be varied slightly yielding Bostrom’s influential 2001
speculation concerning life as a computer simulation, AI variations, and
parallel universes.15 Bostrom takes his own point of departure with the
assumption that the sort of thing “later generations might do with their
super-powerful computers” would likely be to “run detailed simulations of
their forebears or of people like their forebears.”16 It is thus supposed that
they would have nothing better to do and it is further supposed that they,
unlike ourselves, fascinated as we are by speculations concerning the
future, would be so very intrigued by their past to the extent of running
“detailed simulations” of the same past.

Here what interests me is the rhetorical gambit and it depends on
authority for its functioning. Paul Feyerabend has recalled the mechanism
of such authoritative, which is what I mean by trump-card type, references.
Thus for Feyerabend (the context was a recollection of physics debates of the
1930s through the 1950s),

the discussion usually went like this. First the defenders of the second
interpretation presented their arguments. Then the opponents raised
objections. The objections were occasionally quite formidable and could
not be easily answered. Then somebody said “but von Neumann has
shown ...” and with that the opposition was silenced.17

‘Continuing in this spirit, one might well suppose that Sorgner’s own
arguments would support a claim for Nietzsche’s sympathies for or
affinities with cybernetics or cyborgs (such as the new ‘digital’ Dionysus
inspired by, among others, Friedrich Kittler)18 as indeed for the technological
singularity to come, now articulated as simply another way of parsing
eternal recurrence.

But Sorgner does not do this and he also opts to defer engaging with the
specific reasons articulated by other transhumanists who vigorously attempt
to maintain a distance from Nietzsche. Instead (and it should be noted that
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least of the garden-variety sort (unless we take that garden, as some do, to
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allusions to Lucretius20 as well as Diogenes Laertius and not less to what
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Sorgner's work is not masked and one of the great strengths of Sorgner's work is this very straightforward quality. Hence and from the start, Sorgner reminds us that when I first became familiar with the transhumanist movement, I immediately thought that there were many fundamental similarities between transhumanism and Nietzsche's philosophy, especially concerning the concept of the posthuman and that of Nietzsche's overhuman.22

But, as Sorgner reflects, apparently with some surprise: a good many transhumanists seem anxious to refuse this coordination. In addition, Jürgen Habermas, opposing the transhumanist movement, concurs with Sorgner's reading, in an inverse direction,23 such that Habermas refuses in his own account what Sorgner embraces in his. Now, it seems to me, one can hardly be surprised at this, for Habermas had long opposed Nietzsche in a number of other respects.24 Thus, and this has changed the landscape and indeed the intrinsically critical force of critical theory, Habermas differs from the perspective of either an Adorno or a Horkheimer or even a Marcuse, all of whom had more specifically critical tolerance for Nietzsche's own brand of critical thinking. It should, but it does not, go without saying that what Anglo-American philosophers (analytic, broadly conceived, that is: mainstream philosophy) call “critical thinking” (meaning thinking that takes an avowedly pro-science perspective) has nothing in common with either Nietzsche or classical critical theory though it does have some elements in common with Habermas.

Sorgner seeks to coordinate Nietzsche and transhumanism point for point, in part by citing Nick Boström's contention that just as transhumanists tend to “view human nature as a work-in-progress,” Nietzsche likewise adheres to “a dynamic will-to-power metaphysics which applies to human and all other beings, and which implies that all things are permanently undergoing some change.”25 So far, so good, one might say. Yet the argumentative parallel in its further projection turns out to cause trouble for Sorgner. Hence and beyond what he calls “ontological dynamics,”26 Sorgner locates additional parallels on the level of values, the same level that is important for Boström as for his own part, Boström argues for a normative appreciation of the transhuman. For Boström, this is related to the demarcation of risk analysis that appeals to the speculative projections critical for research of this kind quite independently of anything so trivially ontic as actual research about actual options. Too empirical, one imagines and this, so it may be argued, is the arch nature of futurology. In his own discussion, Sorgner begins, rightly I believe, by emphasizing both Nietzsche's critique of religion and morality in addition to underscoring Nietzsche's regard for science and scientific thinking.

As Sorgner argues, Nietzsche can be aligned with those who favor what transhumanists call “human enhancements” to the extent that “human beings strive for power” and, so Sorgner continues to make what turns out to be his crucial argumentative point: “If you will power, then it is in your interest to enhance yourself.”28 For Sorgner, this point can be taken as supporting the case that Nietzsche could well have been said to have been in favour of genetic engineering, even though he mainly stresses the importance of education for the occurrence of the evolutionary step towards the overhuman. If genetic engineering, or liberal eugenics, can actually be seen as a special type of education, which is what transhumanists seem to hold, then it is possible that this position would have been held by Nietzsche, too, as education played a significant role in his ethics. He affirmed science, and he was in favour of enhancement, and the bringing about of the overhuman.29

Thus we may reconstruct Sorgner's (and not only Sorgner's) chained conventionality here: education = evolution = genetic engineering, noting to be sure that both education and genetic evolution are here regarded as kinds of proactive 'evolution.' Hence and just as Boström argues that we should seek to broaden ourselves, Sorgner similarly seeks to argue that this same broadening corresponds to just what Nietzsche meant by self-overcoming. For Sorgner,

Higher humans wish to permanently overcome themselves, to become stronger in the various aspects which can get developed in a human being, so that finally the overhuman can come into existence. In transhumanist thought, Nietzsche's overhuman is being referred to as "posthuman."30

Patently, Sorgner distinguishes Nietzsche's post-human from other transhumanist definitions of the posthuman in order to demonstrate that Nietzsche's Übermensch or overhuman is the posthuman.31 In every case, so Sorgner contends, Nietzsche would have been in favor of enhancement and Sorgner thinks it plausible to suppose that (and at this would be at the very least) Nietzsche believed in a certain transhumanist possibility corresponding in turn to his teaching of the overhuman.

Sorgner goes further in this regard by noting that where the transhumanists fail to provide a basis for their teaching of the transhuman, Nietzsche does provide such a basis, with the consequence that on Sorgner’s reading just this fundament explains the “relevance of the overhuman for his philosophy. The overhuman may even be the ultimate
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Sorgner's transhumanism. As Sloterdijk explains it, we find in Günther's work

the concept of a "formless matter" [that] embodies ... all that's been thought between Hegel and Turing on the relation of "things" to "mind." It tests out a trivalent—or multivalent—logic that's so potent it could rid us of the impotent, brutal binarism of the mind/thing, subject/object, idea/matter type.39

I should add that it matters here that Sloterdijk also recommends the cybernetician, in today's terms, we should say the theoretical neuroscientists, Warren McCulloch, who was "junior," as Sloterdijk reminds us, helping us keep our time consciousness here, to Norbert Weiner.39 Indeed, there is nothing like cybernetics and systems theory and its allure has animated the military industrial world, especially but not only in the United States.

Sorgner could do worse than to turn to Sloterdijk's Critique of Cynical Reason, especially the bits at the end, where Sloterdijk is able to argue that futurists like Toffler and McLuhan (again, not unlike Kurzweil as noted above),41 are for their own futuristic part surprisingly dependent upon an earlier generation of thinkers, not so much cold war but pre-World War II thinkers, like Friedrich Dessauer, but also Walter Rathaus, and Adrien Turel in a decidedly uncanny context that was the crucible for the particular fascism that grew out of the Weimar Republic on Sloterdijk's account.

If we add these bits of context to the transhumanist debate, Habermas and his opposition to Nietzsche comes into rather better focus.

Hence it is not too surprising that some will find it hard not to think of Ray Kurzweil's (or should one not say, at least to respect the interest of copyright, Vinge's/Ulam's/von Neumann's?) "technological singularity" or what I already opted to name, via Star Trek, the machine-human mind-meld, when Sloterdijk reflects upon his Rules for the Human Zoo noting that

its strong epistemological linkage between concepts like 'Dionysian materialism' and 'vitalism,' a linkage made even more interesting by the fact that the life sciences and life technics have just passed into a new phase of their development.42

Beyond the debate internal to the politics of German public intellectuals, the theme for Sloterdijk is anthropotechnics: the technique of the manufacture of humanity, and it is not a German but a global concern:

Nietzsche and Plato have invited themselves to the 'symposium' to comment on the ideas of Heidegger, to put forward their opinions on the
foundation for his Worldview. This foundational and systematic advantage permits Sorgner to offer the coordinate argument that to the extent that the "overhuman represents the meaning of the earth," it can only be "in the interest of higher humans to permanently overcome themselves." Key for Sorgner is the focus not on the afterlife, which Sorgner here conceives in a fairly traditionally enlightened parallel or coordination with a focus on science rather than and by contrast with traditional religion, but on meaning instead.

And yet, as we have noted, Sorgner chooses not to take his point of departure by inquiring into the reasons Boström and Habermas in addition to others including, albeit for different reasons, the musically and creatively content-concerned Jaron Lanier — all of whom do tend to seek to keep Nietzsche at a distance. Indeed: many in the current context of cybernetics-cum-cyborg lifestyle exclude any and all references to Nietzsche, not least perhaps because such references inevitably involve a number of historical and historicist issues. These are observations on his opponents not eternal truths and one might think that Sorgner would first offer at least a preliminary reflection, if not on Boström (whom he does consider) or Lanier (whom Sorgner does not consider, just as Sorgner also excludes reflection on Peter Sloterdijk and Günther Anders, both of whom I already mentioned and to whom I return below) then perhaps, at the very least, on the reasons Habermas advances for finding it necessary to argue contra the transhumanist movement and indeed regarding Habermas’s reasons for assimilating Nietzsche to the same movement.

I am not here advocating the Habermasian side per se. But I am suggesting that it is essential to advert to Habermas’s constellation of arguments here as these are also specific to a set of concerns that had already in another more controversial and related context pitted Habermas contra Sloterdijk’s infamous Elmau lecture, Rules for the Human Zoo. Here the obvious merits attention, and not just because what one takes to be “obvious” is often less well known than one supposes. For Habermas’s opposition to Nietzsche and a range of other thinkers in a broad swath tends to include Martin Heidegger but also Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida, and latterly Sloterdijk, and if Sorgner is not careful here, Sorgner himself (not that this is not a great set of companions in thought).

For his own part, Sloterdijk seems concordant with Sorgner, to the extent that Sloterdijk recommends that we read otherwise esoteric cybernetic theorists like Gotthard Günther, notably his 1963 book, The Consciousness of Machines: A Metaphysics of Cybernetics. Günther himself, a German-American systems thinker, echoes an audaciously technological optimism which we may recognize as sympathetic to Sorgner’s transhumanism. As Sloterdijk explains it, we find in Günther’s work

the concept of a “formless matter” [that] embodies ... all that’s been thought between Hegel and Turing on the relation of “things” to “mind.” It tests out a trivalent—or multivalent—logic that’s so potent it could rid us of the impotent, brutal binarism of the mind/thing, subject/object, idea/matter type...

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Chapter Eight

which is all about not becoming the one you are but, and to be sure the message of the genome project or stem cells, is indeed anthropotechnics, Kurzweil’s vision of the ‘technological singularity’ as it has been embraced by (at least some elements of) popular culture, when it is not the message of the genome project or stem cells, is indeed anthropotechnics, which is all about not becoming the one you are but, and to be sure becoming the one you wish you were, the one you ‘should have’ been all along.

Call this the Harry Potter effect, or everyone is a boy wizard, quidditch player, best in sports, all secret greatness and unfair discrimination, at least, in the germ, at least until after the singularity: in just the way that it may be argued that we have been transhuman all the while we have, in Bruno Latour’s words “never been modern,” it can and has repeatedly been claimed that everything will be perfect after the revolution. For Marx, this was the revolution he famously failed to locate rightly, not in his industrial England or even in his Germany but and however disastrously and unsustainably where it did change the world in Russia and (still ongoing) in a China that is today increasingly indistinguishable from a capitalist regime (just ask the international financier Maurice Strong or for the same answer from a different source, ask Žižek). Apart from Marx, and closer to home, the “revolution” that was promised to change everything, at least when I was eleven going on twelve, was a sociocultural, leftist revolution, that was the revolution of the 1968 generation as it played itself into nothing but the idols of the market: lots of music, drugs, distractions of sex and the compulsion to announce one’s erotic orientation to the world. So we ask, which revolution? The technological revolution, of course. And who announces this but those who market the same? The technological singularity is suspiciously not unlike a Coke commercial. We are the world.

Technology, qua transhumanist conventionality, has an ever growing appeal, more than the vision of the robotics of the Asimovian past, and this may be, perhaps, traced to certain stubborn limitations in cognate fields. Practically minded as I am, I like to suppose that this may be because the biological business of genetic engineering, retro-fitting genes, and such like, has not been going as well as anticipated, perhaps owing to the pesky detail that genes work badly on the model of add-a-gene-and-stir varieties of genetic engineering but also that cloning adult organisms seems to produce young organisms that senesce and die markedly faster than young organisms usually do, be they sheep or mice or Korean puppies for the clone-your-Shi-Tzu market (with all the future woe this betides for the ethically catastrophic dog cloning commercial enterprise, speaking not of whether one should but of the consequences for those who do, quite apart from the dozens and dozens of dogs killed to ‘manufacture’ this one quasi-identical dog — but what is identity? the philosophers ask). Hence with all the troubles facing hard science, soft science, the science of clouds and apps that is the stuff of the coming technological rapture, vague as it is, may promise more success. Can’t get Apple and IBM to play right? Make a virtual machine, dual boot it (at least for the minority still capable of doing that these days): Apple and IBM still won’t play right but you won’t know it. Or maybe, owing to our own contouring of our own consciousness to the limits and constraints of the digital interface, be it that of email or of gaming or of the increasingly ubiquitous social networking (Facebook now appeals to the young, and the old and everyone in between, despite the social horror that it is for teens to ‘friend’ their parents), we increasingly find the flatness of computer-enhanced experience exactly as charming as its purveyors claim. Go Pokémon.

Here we note the very specific (and very popularly Nietzschean) “faith” in science as we began by discussing this faith and the industrial, corporate, capitalist technology that has, if we read Sloterdijk aright, been with us since the interregnum between the two wars. But this is again and also to say that such a vision cannot but be fascist through and through. All this gives us is another reason to ‘prepare’ for the coming singularity. But that may be less than or at least other than anticipated. And as with other religious raptures, one does not expect to have a choice. And one thinks this no matter how underwhelming the experience turns out to be in actual experience.

Like Conrad, the object of fan-girl affection in a bygone musical, we “love” our iPhones — O yes we do. Here what matters is not affect as much as brand loyalty — O Conrad, we’ll be true. Even with all its limitations, we are happy to say: O iPhone, we love you.

Along with the idealized expectation of technological rapture goes a vision of technological oversimplification that is not quite a result of our being closer and closer to a future we once imagined. In other words, it is significant that talk of 2045 was once upon a time talk of unimaginably distant era, as was talk of 2012. Or 1998 — which was indeed and to be sure, and this matters immensely, the projected future for the 1968 American television series Lost in Space.
becoming the one you wish you were, the one you 'should have' been all which is all about not becoming the one you are but, and to be sure message of the genome project or stem cells, is indeed anthropotechnics, Kurzweil's vision of the 'technological singularity' as it has been embraced by (at least some elements of) popular culture, when it is not the message of the genome project or stem cells, is indeed anthropotechnics, which is all about not becoming the one you are but, and to be sure becoming the one you wish you were, the one you 'should have' been all along.

Sloterdijk's point is increasingly relevant and the message of Kurzweil’s vision of the 'technological singularity' as it has been embraced by (at least some elements of) popular culture, when it is not the message of the genome project or stem cells, is indeed anthropotechnics, which is all about not becoming the one you are but, and to be sure becoming the one you wish you were, the one you 'should have' been all along.

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Like Conrad, the object of fan-girl affection in a bygone musical, we "love" our iPhones — O yes we do. Here what matters is not affect as much as brand loyalty — O Conrad, well be true. Even with all its limitations, we are happy to say: O iPhone, we love you. Along with the idealized expectation of technological rapture goes a vision of technological oversimplification that is not quite a result of our being closer and closer to a future we once imagined. In other words, it is significant that talk of 2045 was once upon a time talk of unimaginably distant era, as was talk of 2012. Or 1998 — which was indeed and to be sure, and this matters immensely, the projected future for the 1968 American television series Lost in Space.
To see this it is worth thinking a bit about Aubrey de Grey, a software developer or programmer who, having learnt sufficient biology for the purpose, has been arguing that we can resist aging if we avoid its causes, to wit the oxidation of cells and the build-up of waste products in those same cells. Having determined that it is the mitochondria that develop problems or 'damage' by getting gunked-up (or losing 'efficiency'), de Grey proposes that we send in little nanobots to clean them out (or indeed, as de Grey also imagines, as so many mechanical replacements). What de Grey has in mind is close to the miniaturized spaceships of *Fantastic Voyage,* the 1966 film of Raquel Welch's travels on a microscopic level, which film title just happens to accord with one of Kurzweil's first books for his ventures into technological rapture. Grey is vague on the details of designing and implementing such a nanobot brigade.

De Grey not only runs an anti-aging foundation (and one supposes that he has all manner of highly motivated and well-heeled investors backing him) but also has an appointment on the faculty of Ray Kurzweil's Singularity University. For it turns out that it is less about biology than technology and marketing, precisely in the way we relate to technology as those who have, as fully vested heirs of a cargo cult, grown up with devices we know how to use from electric appliances, toilets (to be Illichian here), televisions and computers, cell-phones and coffee-makers, automobiles and airplane travel, but could not ourselves fabricate if our lives depended on it (this is the ominous subtext of the future-as-desert film genre, like *Road Warrior or Mad Max*). Assuming as we do that someone else makes the tool, or writes the code for our app idea, i.e., assuming that some factory actually deploys the technology, the gadgets are what it is all about.

Thus critics object that, like Kurzweil, de Grey does not seem to mind too much that the technology supposed by the theorizing (this would be de Grey's theorizing) or futuristic speculation (this would be Kurzweil picking up after Walt Disney left off and telling us what life will be like in 2025 or 2045) does not 'exist' as yet. Thus these are cheap ontic objections. All that, so we suppose, like space flight and jetpacks will come. And as if on cue, Virgin Airlines is currently selling tickets for space flight for civilians (we are still waiting for the jetpacks). As iPhone commercials insist on proclaiming, always without needing to ask what we might have in mind (doesn't matter): there's an app for that (or we just know there will be).
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Sorgner as Educator: Transhumanism as the New ‘Future’ of our Educational Institutions

Sorgner seems to assume this same chirpily upbeat, technological focus: the transhuman is the human plus (whatever) technological enhancement. As a specific, Sorgner attends to the issue of Nietzsche and evolution, an issue that is itself far from straightforward (most readings of Nietzsche and evolution depend upon a fairly limited understanding of both Darwin and Nietzsche’s own understanding of Darwin).

We can hardly raise all the relevant questions that remain to be explored on the (very, very) complicated theme of Nietzsche and Darwin, but the key issue seems to be the (may we say mildly Lamarckian?) parallel Sorgner constructs between education and genetic enhancement. As Sorgner contends, education and genetic enhancement are “structurally analogous procedures.”

But, Lamarck to one side, it is worth asking what Sorgner means by “education”? Does Sorgner understand this in the traditional sense of Bildung or as what counts for the French as formation and where we may speak of either in terms of what Nietzsche also called getting oneself a culture, that is: personal and intellectual cultivation?

Or and now apart from these traditional meanings, will an “education” correspond to nothing more than the business (emphasis on the economic or cost-based affair) of acquiring and conferring, i.e., obtaining and selling degrees and certificates — indeed and just as Sorgner suggests, all like such modules, courses, degrees, parallel to many add-ons and upgrades, like iPhone or android apps and the enormous market that there is for cellphone accessories, which same pale in comparison to the market for iPad accessories, Apple and otherwise? And yet, it may be that this surface parallel calls for a bit more reflection, especially with regard to Nietzsche who himself reflected quite a bit on educational institutions as well as the idea of education — even if we begin with his very paradoxical, very provocative claim: “There are no educators” [Es gibt keine Erzieher] (HH II, The Wanderer and his Shadow § 267).

What is certain is that many of us even within the academy do tend to suppose that education is just and only the acquisition of such degrees, especially at the graduate but also at the undergraduate level, and especially as evident in the current debate in England and mainland Europe on the virtues of the privatization of the university — a debate which manages to overlook any review of the actual practice of the same as this can be found in the US. No need for factual feedback to sully our models, as Orrin Pilkey, a very practical or applied or hands-on coastal
scientist has argued with stunning consequentiality when it comes to beach
erosion and the public costs of “maintaining” the same and with very
specific meteorological applicability to the debates on global warming. I.e., no empiricism, please: we’re idealists.

Nietzsche’s own reflections on what is needed for an “education” as such are quite formidable — even as his own education was an extraordinary one. Thus we betray something of the limitations of our own formation whenever we as scholars or commentators find ourselves insisting that Nietzsche took or borrowed his ideas from other thinkers — ranging from Pascal and Spinoza or else Spir and Lange or Emerson, or Gerber, or Stirner or ultimately and of course, from Wagner himself (especially for the Wagnerians for whom no limit to the master’s own cultural prowess can be imagined). I am not saying that Nietzsche was not familiar with these thinkers: I am saying that an education is this familiarity and much, much more. Thus although it is amusing to note that the identity of the supposed origination of (the so-called ‘sources’ for) Nietzsche’s ideas just happens to change in the scholarly literature over time (and not less with the mood and, nota bene, educational formation of his commentators), it is also noteworthy that the very same set of assumptions applies (negatively speaking) for those who are fond of insisting that Nietzsche could never have read Kant (just to pick one example, contentious given the influence of Kant on the 19th century, an influence we fail to see in the 20th as in the 21st century, at least so far).

The idea that an education, the getting of or the having of one, is a simple affair, and thus that the parallel idea of an upgrade to the more-than-human, that is now: the trans-human, would simply be like taking a course or like signing up for an instructive module, supposes that one pretend (as transhumanists do like to pretend) that one can/should set aside the identity of the supposed origination of (the so-called ‘sources’ for) Nietzsche’s ideas just happens to change in the scholarly literature over time (and not less with the mood and, noted here, educational formation of his commentators), it is also noteworthy that the very same set of assumptions applies (negatively speaking) for those who are fond of insisting that Nietzsche could never have read Kant (just to pick one example, contentious given the influence of Kant on the 19th century, an influence we fail to see in the 20th as in the 21st century, at least so far).

The problem here is the problem with any of Nietzsche’s texts: like Proteus, Nietzsche’s words turn in our hands. Thus Nietzsche turns, emphasizing with respect to that same evolution that “its goal is precisely that seemingly scattered and random existences that arise here and there under favorable conditions.” (Ibid.) The point to be taken is posed against, as Nietzsche puts it at this juncture: “Mr. Commonman.” (Ibid.)

What is at issue for what we might regard as Nietzsche’s own brand of transhumanism, if we may so speak of the self-overcoming that is the transition to the overhuman, the post-human, is not only that it is no kind of humanism, other than that served, this would be nothing other than Nietzsche’s “future humaneness” (GS §337), this would be what I have elsewhere described and analyzed as the “bravest democratic fugue” ever written, by Nietzsche or anyone else (forgive me, Wagnerians of the world). Thus I argue that Nietzsche’s “genius of the heart” (BGE §295) communicates an uncanny, shattering, ultimately unsettling, disquieting and quieting “fanfare” for the common man. To this extent, the genius Nietzsche’s pied piper comes to teach is not the transmogrified, new and improved humanism of transhumanism but and much rather and this is related to his Zarathustrian teaching of the over-human, beyond the self-satisfactions of
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than-human, that is now: the trans-human, would simply be like taking a
course or like signing up for an instructive module, supposes that one pretend (as transhumanists do like to pretend) that one can/should set aside
questions of cultural inequalities, differences in wealth, “class” differences
and so on. In this (an sich inherently optimistic when it is not calculating
when it is not deliberately mendacious) regard, the transhumanist
movement may be revealed as a humanism, here using the term as Jean-
Paul Sartre once spoke of Existentialism as a Humanism.56 Hence and at
least in principle, human enhancement may be regarded, if only for the
sake of argument, as corresponding to “enhancement for all,” like “micro-
chips for all,” or “airport security searches for all.”

Ultimately, as Leibniz might help to remind us, such a broad extension
would lead to a society not of “enhanced” but and much rather of leveled
or flattened out humanity. Nor is this all-too surprising where the ideal of
humanism in question mirrors contemporary consumer society, viewed
from the corporate side of the equation. In the commercial world view of
the corporate mindset, everyone ought to have (that means ought to buy)
an iPhone, iPad, Mac computer/laptop/airbook, heck everyone should have
ALL the stuff in the Apple store, etc. Beyond iPads or iPhones (and for the
sake of argument, android smart phones running android or related
programs may be counted as iPhones we can also add in other desirable
items or array of items (flat screen tv, luxury car, new kitchen appliances,
‘smart’ houses — although these last, long insisted upon by technology
enthusiasts for the last half century under a variety of names, have yet to
catch on... and so on).

Sorgner argues that Nietzsche would back this enhanced or “accessory” life, as the transhumanist life for all and sundry. But,
Nietzsche also sidesteps this same advocacy. Hence although I believe that
we may read Nietzsche as advocating Sorgner’s transhumanism when
Nietzsche writes of a lesson that Nietzsche argues is one that may be
drawn from the mirror of nature — “the only thing that matters is the
superior individual exemplar, the more unusual, more powerful, more
complex, more fruitful exemplar,” (SE §6) — as this is a point Nietzsche
seems to intensify, as virtually transhumanist as Sorgner or anyone
pleases, Nietzsche continues to emphasize that “the goal of any species’
evolution is the point at which it reaches its limit and begins the transition
to a higher species.” (Ibid.)

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Zarathustrian teaching of the over-human, beyond the self-satisfactions of
the self (this is the reference to Lucian's parodic hyperanthropos) and just to the extent that such a post-humanism turns out to be all about going beyond oneself. That anti-self-satisfied dimension is the heart of, the art of acquiring nothing less than a culture in place of the self-absorptions of the ego, the dear little self. But this is to say that it is not a religious, Judeo-Christian kind of altruism, redeemable in trade for more or longer life, even unto infinity and it is not a humanism. Hence Nietzsche excludes the kind of a transhumanism Sorgner speaks of, because and qua “enhancement,” transhumanism is not at all about self-overcoming but is very much about self-preservation, self-assertion, self-advancement.

As an overcoming of rather than an enhancing of the human (or perhaps better said, of the all-too-human), the meaning of Nietzsche's over-human turns out to be the meaning not of the human but of the earth. In part, this is the essence of, this is the meaning of Pindar’s word to the perhaps better said, of the all-too-human), the meaning of Nietzsche’s “enhancement,” transhumanism is not at all about self-overcoming but is very much about self-preservation, self-assertion, self-advancement.

Nietzsche's Post-Human Imperative

As an overcoming of rather than an enhancing of the human (or perhaps better said, of the all-too-human), the meaning of Nietzsche’s over-human turns out to be the meaning not of the human but of the earth. In part, this is the essence of, this is the meaning of Pindar’s word to the seldom-encountered, to the rare as Nietzsche quotes this throughout his own life: *become the one you are*. In Nietzsche’s early meditation on *Schopenhauer as Educator*, as referred to above, Nietzsche explains the point to our Mr. Commonman by asking him to reflect on how his life can have meaning or value at all only to answer in what seems to be Sorgner’s spirit, appealing to a perfectly upgradable, trans-humanist project: “Surely only by living for the benefit of the rarest and most valuable exemplars, not for the benefit of the majority, that is, for the benefit of those who, taken as individuals, are the least valuable species.” (SE §6)

The implicit elitism here cannot but alienate many of Nietzsche’s readers. Nor is this particular kind of elitism incidental: for Nietzsche insists on it again and again. Indeed his project from the start to the end of his creative life was nothing other than the production of a higher culture in broad terms and on the individual level of genius, whereby Nietzsche supposed the first to require the second, i.e., that the restoration on the level of culture of a once and yet higher culture called for that same rare genius. And Nietzsche took care to emphasize and to reflect upon the significance of that same rarity. For Nietzsche, and this is perhaps his greatest distance from the transhumanist movement, this particular rarity will not be an upgrade money can buy. The object of such design, on Nietzsche’s account, are the values themselves as Nietzsche regarded such values, empirically enough, as values of middle-rank: mediocrity.

Here related to elitism would seem to be the ‘spectre’ which we may also and very politely call “the” problem of eugenics. But, as Sorgner emphasizes (and as Boström also argues) it won’t be Nazi eugenics, but and much rather (but how different this is?) a liberal eugenics that one might support. The difference is that Boström is anxious to limit associations with Nietzsche in order to lend coherence to a rhetorical assertion that transhuman value judgments would not necessarily go along with the spectacle of posthumans in contest with humans, and thereby suggesting that negative scenarios would be unlikely and hence need not be unduly feared. Thus Sorgner could say that there is nothing problematic in comparing one scholar’s masters from Cambridge with his masters from Durham, or another scholar’s Oxford PhD with one from Jena. Except, of course for an employer in the all-too status conscious world of university philosophy. This is just what Bourdieu called cultural capital and it can be argued that such differences make no real difference (this egalitarian presumption was what Bourdieu began with, was not, as it turned out, vindicated by Bourdieu’s research). Nor is it an accident that the right kind of educational pedigree confers what Bourdieu calls “cultural nobility.” This is the Harvard or Oxford or Cambridge effect.

Thus the conviction that it would not matter too much if some had transhuman upgrades and some did not, is like the conviction that it does not matter that one person has a degree from wherever university and another person has a degree from the same Harvard that was certainly if perhaps only serendipitously happy to publish Bourdieu’s *Distinction*. Thus the distinction between Nazi eugenics and liberal eugenics surely matters in some sense but how would that difference make a difference to those who might be considered ‘merely’ human as opposed to the new transhuman, and assuming the progress we already know from consumer models for such things, those considered no more than the original transhuman versus the latest model of the same. I am talking about the putative subhuman, say, by comparison with the putative overhuman. This is the original iPhone vs. the currently current model, iPhone 6S or and indeed and this would be my point vs. the awaited iPhone SE (or X or whatever) version, etc.

Here it is relevant to note that in the literature, rather like the not-quite-really-there-yet qualities of post-op transmen and transwomen, the transhuman is the transitional human: on the way to a perfect model that the marketing department, again very like the iPhone, Kurzweil’s favorite example for being (already) technologically enhanced, already has in planning, but has yet to “release.” The tension this produces is fantastic because it is of a piece with marketing. One wants the newest iPhone, with just those features it happens to have; at the same time one wants to wait for the next iPhone, because there is no way to know, with perfect certainty, for sure, for sure, if the newest gadget has all the promised qualities advertised as desirable, qualities the one around the corner might have. There are upgrades and then there are upgrades and the consumer
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has learned that there is no difference in cost only in release time: all new
phone versions are the same, cost-wise, on balance, what differs is the
quality of the upgrade between differing instaurations. Indeed, while one may argue that if the supposed
ideal behind the transhumanist movement is to create a better world for
all, anything that involves technology also involves not randomness and not luck so much as money.

This is, of course, the old story of those who have and those who have not. This too would fit, rather nicely, Sorgner’s point with respect to the
structural analogies to be had between education and genetic enhancement.
And in every version of the world as we know it, present and past, only
those with class privilege (call this money, call this being part of the right
group of people) have access to the ultimate advantages of education. Thus
it is not for nothing that the late (and not accidently saintly) Ivan Illich
took care to remind us of what most academics, inured to the school system as they are, never point out: school educates us to have very
specific, i.e., very elite tastes in music, food, travel, consumption. Hence,
following Sorgner’s parallel between education and transhumanism for the
sake of argument here, in the transhumanist world as Sorgner envisions it
along with Kurzweil and de Grey as the world to come (this would be the
post BP old-spill world to go with the ongoing old [but not reported]
coupled with the new [but not reported] spills or leaks in the Gulf of
Mexico, post-earthquake world in Japan, here with the same caveats, and
the same lack of news reports on the same ongoing consequences of
radiation fallout), in this new world, only those with ample resources
(financial and otherwise) will have access to transhuman enhancements,
just as only those with access to advanced medical care can afford the
implants that can keep a failing heart going — and this is true today as
well and on any level of technology, be it a heart transplant, a pacemaker
or even a shunt. Add to that the cost of those life-style changes (drugs,
foodstuffs, leisure or care) required in order to provide the necessary
supports needed for life with a heart transplant, pacemaker, etc. And now
we are back to the cost of the future transhuman via xenotransplants to be
harvested from the pig-human chimeras now in production for those with
means.

It is popular to advert to the most empirically (if one wishes to
consider the facts) disproven vision of economics, the economic ideal that
nevertheless and still dominates most markets, namely the idea that
capitalism advances culture, that enhancing the wealth of the wealthy, that
enhancing the well-being of the wealthy is 'somehow' in the interest of
everyone. But as Nietzsche points out of the fantasy of an eternal reward,
one has to wait a long time for the reward. Call it trickle-down economics,
or call it whatever you like, this is the economics of the scratch-card
lottery and it is a fantasy.

Nevertheless and beyond such phantasms as palliative stories favored
by the wealthy and by those who wish to be like them, there is a key
difference between the ideal of education Sorgner adduces and access to
the kind of thing that has investors speculating on 'leadership' (always
another word for corporate interests) in Kurzweil's Singularity University.

For education can be had, education does exist, and there are better and
worse articulations of the same and it is also true that some people have a
better education than others not just because of their own aptness, their
intrinsic ability but and just because their training was itself the result of
greater reflection, care, design, paideia. As Nietzsche reminds us from
the very start of his Schopenhauer as Educator, ultimately the individual
is responsible. But what Nietzsche means by an education is not what the
university educator means by it and it is not is not on at either Singularity
University or Harvard.

As Al Lingis argues, as Ivan Illich had argued before him, the sick
individual must eschew the position of patient: there is a moral imperative
to health, i.e., one must take responsibility for one's own health. In the
same way, one must take responsibility for and that is to say one must
choose or 'select, elect or design one's own education, one's own
educators. And it is this that Nietzsche means when he says as already
cited: "there are no educators."

In every case, as Nietzsche already saw in his own reflections on what
he called very specifically "The Future of our Educational Institutions,
the task of getting oneself an education, getting oneself an educator, falls
to the individual. Thus if we cannot answer Illich's charges that our ideal
of education so far from 'enhancing' society and so far from "enhancing"
the individual within that society (this is Sorgner's model) perpetuates a
particular and not accidentally capitalist structure, inculcating (as Illich
emphasized and as Adorno would emphasize and as Marcuse would
emphasize) the very same point Nietzsche had in mind with his own
utterly non-socialist challenge to Mr. Commonman, what we can note is
that so very far from culture, we find only identical consumer tastes for
what are only identical consumer goods in a world of limited resources, a
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has learned that there is no difference in cost only in release time: all new phone versions are the same, cost-wise, on balance, what differs is the quality of the upgrade between differing instaurations.62

Withal, it takes Sorgner nine good steps in order to pose the financial (in a Marxian framework this is also a "class") question. I have already observed that this question always attends the supposed coming technological singularity. Indeed, while one may argue that if the supposed ideal behind the transhumanist movement is to create a better world for all, anything that involves technology also involves not randomness and not luck so much as money.

This is, of course, the old story of those who have and those who have not. This too would fit, rather nicely, Sorgner's point with respect to the structural analogies to be had between education and genetic enhancement. And in every version of the world as we know it, present and past, only those with class privilege (call this money, call this being part of the right group of people) have access to the ultimate advantages of education. Thus it is not for nothing that the late (and not accidently saintly) Ivan Illich took care to remind us of what most academics, inured to the school system as they are, never point out: school educates us to have very specific, i.e., very elite tastes in music, food, travel, consumption.®* Hence, following Sorgner's parallel between education and transhumanism for the sake of argument here, in the transhumanist world as Sorgner envisions it along with Kurzweil and de Grey as the world to come (this would be the post BP old-spill world to go with the ongoing old [but not reported] coupled with the new [but not reported] spills or leaks in the Gulf of Mexico, post-earthquake world in Japan, here with the same caveats, and the same lack of news reports on the same ongoing consequences of radiation fallout), in this new world, only those with ample resources (financial and otherwise) will have access to transhuman enhancements, just as only those with access to advanced medical care can afford the implants that can keep a failing heart going — and this is true today as well and on any level of technology, be it a heart transplant, a pacemaker or even a shunt. Add to that the cost of those life-style changes (drugs, foodstuffs, leisure or care) required in order to provide the necessary supports needed for life with a heart transplant, pacemaker, etc. And now we are back to the cost of the future transhuman via xenotransplants to be harvested from the pig-human chimeras now in production for those with means.

It is popular to advert to the most empirically (if one wishes to consider the facts) disproven vision of economics, the economic ideal that nevertheless and still dominates most markets, namely the idea that capitalism advances culture, that enhancing the wealth of the wealthy, that enhancing the well-being of the wealthy is 'somehow' in the interest of everyone. But as Nietzsche points out of the fantasy of an eternal reward, one has to wait a long time for the reward. Call it trickle-down economics, or call it whatever you like, this is the economics of the scratch-card lottery and it is a fantasy.

Nevertheless and beyond such phantasms as palliative stories favored by the wealthy and by those who wish to be like them, there is a key difference between the ideal of education Sorgner adduces and access to the kind of thing that has investors speculating on 'leadership' (always another word for corporate interests) in Kurzweil's Singularity University.65

For education can be had, education does exist, and there are better and worse articulations of the same and it is also true that some people have a better education than others not just because of their own aptness, their intrinsic ability but and just because their training was itself the result of greater reflection, care, design, paideia.66 As Nietzsche reminds us from the very start of his Schopenhauer as Educator, ultimately the individual is responsible. But what Nietzsche means by an education is not what the university educator means by it and it is not is not on at either Singularity University or Harvard.67

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In every case, as Nietzsche already saw in his own reflections on what he called very specifically "The Future of our Educational Institutions," the task of getting oneself an education, getting oneself an educator, falls to the individual. Thus if we cannot answer Illich's charges that our ideal of education so far from 'enhancing' society and so far from "enhancing" the individual within that society (this is Sorgner's model) perpetuates a particular and not accidentally capitalist structure, inculcating (as Illich emphasized and as Adorno would emphasize and as Marcuse would emphasize) the very same point Nietzsche had in mind with his own utterly non-socialist challenge to Mr. Commonman, what we can note is that so very far from culture, we find only identical consumer tastes for what are only identical consumer goods in a world of limited resources, a world already set to serve the profit of increasingly few. Education, to paraphrase Nietzsche, likewise.
But this more critical point, though I think it needs to be made, is less significant than the insight I share, I think, with Illich and with Sorgner: there is the formation of skill or training and this can, as Sorgner rightly argues, avail us nothing less remarkable than what Nietzsche calls a second nature. Thereby the individual is empowered to climb, as Nietzsche argues, up to his or her higher, second self by means of these, one’s educators.59

This second self might count as the transhuman but this is not usually what we mean by it. And Kurzweil, like most rich men, simply would rather not give up the riches of his life, not now, not ever. The technological singularity is all about not dying. Transhumanism is about not dying. Hence when we argue on behalf of transhumanism we argue as very dedicated devotees of a cargo cult that has yet to deliver the goods — which is why it is a cult. Just because, as the old New York City Jewish joke (Woody Allen tells this joke in Hannah and Her Sisters) argues on behalf of the neurosis of a relative who thinks he is a chicken: “we need the eggs.” We need, we want what transhumanism promises. This cargo cult faith goes together with a conviction that the only thing that holds science back from this windfall of technological add-ons and upgrades is some ethical aversion to, say, stem cell research, so we argue for the “value” of transhumanism, just to quell such objections.60

And yet at the current time, the vaunted enhancements of transhumanism are still so many motes in the eye of a technological demon yet to be born. And by fixing our sights on these possibilities, these promised promises, we overlook the more urgent problems all around us and we pass over the experience that is or should be common to us, the experience of technologies gone wrong, of unanticipated side-effects of the kind one can never anticipate apart from the instruction of practice.

What fascinates us here is pure promise, sheer potential. Although at the moment of this writing, we can do none of this, we are preoccupied with the sheer idea of transhumanism: we are so tired of the merely human, the human, all too human that we want transhumanism. And Nietzsche must be its prophet. But this is not new, as Bostrom reminds us, tracing the idea and the ideal back to Gilgamesh and his search for a cure for his friend Enkidu, like Kurzweil’s putative search for what would have cured, not himself, but his father. Thus we have been preoccupied with the idea of creating ourselves, in our own image, for centuries, for millennia, recall Talos, the man of bronze, or else the Golem, the being made from clay, as Genesis tells us we are made in the image of deity, or else and as we confidently read Plato’s noble lie, we imagine ourselves secretly formed in our core on the basis of essence of gold of silver of brass. Today, perhaps we think of a combination of plastic and metal, opting for the simulacrum of the human or dispense with all of that for the dream consciousness that would be digitally enhanced humanity, now reduced to nothing but digital reverberations: coded humanity, the program, the circuit, the network.

For as long as we have been a conversation on this question of being human, our thoughts are there in being ourselves our own originators. So what, we say, that we are not nearly so near to this consummation as all our intellectual efforts on this theme might make us suppose? Are we not already transhuman because, after all, some of us see by means of contact lenses? Are we not, all of us, already trusman because a chip embedded in one paralyzed woman’s brain functions to allow the most minimal of effects? Intriguingly we argue this one-way influence. Do such achievements count as an evolution to a ‘higher’ (because techno-enhanced) species? Are we not already transhuman because of pacemakers, artificial limbs and joints, crutches and wheelchairs?

We do make such claims, note only the way we talk about the wounded American soldiers and contractors back from Iraq and back from Afghanistan. Beyond these our ongoing US wars, each one of which we may hope is only temporary but each one of which has since proven itself to be astonishingly durable, we also have long practice making transanimals and we do this for every peaceful or market-driven reason—which does not mean that it is not, as Nietzsche would say, thoroughly soaked in blood, and for long time. We breed and raise animals in order to sell them more efficiently but also in order to experiment on them trying out medical, therapeutic uses for animal parts (this will also be a kind of transhumanism) all already in place for diabetics and heart surgery, all with little written about this, all with as little supervision as possible (and biological scientists treat the concerns of the public as so much interference, as anti-science, and thus devote pages of peer-reviewed articles to reviewing means that might be deployed to ‘educate’ the public such that it would not oppose their expert-sanctioned policies of species extirpation, as this serves the advantages of exploiting animal parts).61

sacrificed to join flesh and machine. And then there is the fact that we are already transhuman inasmuch as we eat cloned beef in addition to beef animals and we do this for every peaceful or market-driven reason—which we do make such claims, note only the way we talk about the wounded American soldiers and contractors back from Iraq and back from Afghanistan. Beyond these our ongoing US wars, each one of which we may hope is only temporary but each one of which has since proven itself to be astonishingly durable, we also have long practice making transanimals and we do this for every peaceful or market-driven reason—which does not mean that it is not, as Nietzsche would say, thoroughly soaked in blood, and for long time. We breed and raise animals in order to sell them more efficiently but also in order to experiment on them trying out medical, therapeutic uses for animal parts (this will also be a kind of transhumanism) all already in place for diabetics and heart surgery, all with little written about this, all with as little supervision as possible (and biological scientists treat the concerns of the public as so much interference, as anti-science, and thus devote pages of peer-reviewed articles to reviewing means that might be deployed to ‘educate’ the public such that it would not oppose their expert-sanctioned policies of species extirpation, as this serves the advantages of exploiting animal parts), sacrificed to join flesh and machine. And then there is the fact that we are already transhuman inasmuch as we eat cloned beef in addition to beef laced with antibiotics and steroids to permit quick growth, for a quick sale and the abysmal everyday holocaust that is the path to industrial scale slaughter. We are what we eat. With regard to bodyparts — organic transplants or technological replacements — we note that obstacles seem to remain, but the technology seems likely to be solved, and in case not,
But this more critical point, though I think it needs to be made, is less significant than the insight I share, I think, with Illich and with Sorgner: there is the formation of skill or training and this can, as Sorgner rightly argues, avail us nothing less remarkable than what Nietzsche calls a second nature. Thereby the individual is empowered to climb, as Nietzsche argues, up to his or her higher, second self by means of these, one’s educators.69

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What fascinates us here is pure promise, sheer potential. Although at the moment of this writing, we can do none of this, we are preoccupied with the sheer idea of transhumanism: we are so tired of the merely human, the human, all too human that we want transhumanism. And Nietzsche must be its prophet. But this is not new, as Bostrom reminds us, tracing the idea and the ideal back to Gilgamesh and his search for a cure for his friend Enkidu, like Kurzweil’s putative search for what would have cured, not himself, but his father. Thus we have been preoccupied with the idea of creating ourselves, in our own image, for centuries, for millennia, recall Talos, the man of bronze, or else the Golem, the being made from clay, as Genesis tells us we are made in the image of deity, or else and as we confidently read Plato’s noble lie, we imagine ourselves secretly formed in our core on the basis of essence of gold of silver of brass. Today, perhaps we think of a combination of plastic and metal, opting for the simulacrum of the human or dispense with all of that for the dream consciousness that would be digitally enhanced humanity, now reduced to nothing but digital reverberations: coded humanity, the program, the circuit, the network.

For as long as we have been a conversation on this question of being human, our thoughts are there in being ourselves our own originators. So what, we say, that we are not nearly so near to this consummation as all our intellectual efforts on this theme might make us suppose? Are we not already transhuman because, after all, some of us see by means of contact lenses? Are we not, all of us, already transhuman because a chip embedded in one paralyzed woman’s brain functions to allow the most minimal of effects? Intriguingly we argue this one-way influence. Do such achievements count as an evolution to a ‘higher’ (because techno-enhanced) species? Are we not already transhuman because of pacemakers, artificial limbs and joints, crutches and wheelchairs?

We do make such claims, note only the way we talk about the wounded American soldiers and contractors back from Iraq and back from Afghanistan. Beyond these our ongoing US wars, each one of which we may hope is only temporary but each one of which has since proven itself to be astonishingly durable, we also have long practice making transanimals and we do this for every peaceful or market-driven reason—which does not mean that it is not, as Nietzsche would say, thoroughly soaked in blood, and for long time. We breed and raise animals in order to sell them more efficiently but also in order to experiment on them trying out medical, therapeutic uses for animal parts (this will also be a kind of transhumanism) all already in place for diabetics and heart surgery, all with little written about this, all with as little supervision as possible (and biological scientists treat the concerns of the public as so much interference, as anti-science, and thus devote pages of peer-reviewed articles to reviewing means that might be deployed to ‘educate’ the public such that it would not oppose their expert-sanctioned policies of species extirpation, as this serves the advantages of exploiting animal parts),71 sacrificed to join flesh and machine. And then there is the fact that we are already transhuman inasmuch as we eat cloned beef in addition to beef laced with antibiotics and steroids to permit quick growth, for a quick sale and the abysmal everyday holocaust that is the path to industrial scale slaughter. We are what we eat. With regard to bodyparts — organic transplants or technological replacements — we note that obstacles seem to remain, but the technology seems likely to be solved, and in case not,
we hope to overcome the immune limitations we currently face by sidestepping the same: this is the allure of stem-cell technology just in that such technology promises to allow us to do the straightforward transplants that we currently cannot manage without staggering requirements for immune-suppressors. So too, the point of cloning: not to reproduce Fluffy (once again, the cloned Fluffy II never looks like the original Fluffy save by the old fashioned breeder’s means of taking the best of a horrifying number of clones [multiple pregnancies/whelps] coupled with desire and a pet owner’s memory deficits)38 and much rather to “grow” bio-identical body parts that might not look the same, but should, if we are lucky, permit us to switch out body parts. (And only science fiction horror enthusiasts, in fiction and film, bother to reflect on the life of the clone that happens to bear those replacement parts for us.)

We need the transhuman just because the transhuman would have, so we imagine, replaceable, up-gradeable parts. This is our cargo-cult of life and death and like the man who visits a psychiatrist on behalf of his brother in Woody Allen’s joke, we need, we want the eggs.

We want to be anything but human. We want, as Günther Anders already argued in his 1956 The Obsolescence of Humanity, to overcome our “promethean shame” and to be like our precisely manufactured objects in all their precision, all their durability, all their replaceability. We wish to be objects with exchangeable parts, infinitely upgradable, as science fiction robot stories have long explored these possibilities. Bad heart? Get a replacement. Bad eyes, replace them with optical sensors, see the way Robocop sees — i.e., in the dark, through walls, complete with grids and autofocus—upgrade to Cyborg vision. Bad spirit, that is to say, afflicted with the ‘disease’ du jour, namely “depression”?39. There are a bunch of pills to help with that. But what we want, at least we think this, is to live forever.

**Nietzsche and Humanism**

I have said that Nietzsche’s philosophy is not a humanism. Thus it is not for nothing that he declares that humanity is something that should be overcome. For Nietzsche, the human being is the ‘skin- disease’ of the earth not because humanity is somehow an awful mistake of creation but because in the human everything base tends to thrive while everything higher tends to perish. This we may call Nietzsche’s Schopenhauerianism. And as Nietzsche observes — contra both Hegel and Darwin, this is the point of his reflection on evolution as noted above — it is not the strong who survive or have dominion but the mediocre, the incurably, perpetually

mediocre. And what dominates in the run of the mill is the slavery moral, which is the only morality that remains in any conflict. This is Ressentiment as Nietzsche famously characterizes as the ascetic ideal. And the ideal of the ascetic is fundamentally anti-life. The ascetic ideal, let us recall, is anti-life in that it opposes everything that life involves and seeks an improvement on that, even if, until now, it has supposed that it would need to live, these are Nietzsche’s words, “a very long time” in order to attain just that compensation, which has until now been promised after death and in eternity.

Transhumanism is thus the latest and maybe not even the best (we should probably wait for the next model) instantiation of the ascetic ideal. One wants life but one does not want life as it is, with all its trouble and mess, with all its banality and its limitations. Instead one wants video- game style life, one wants movie or television life: without suffering, without illness, without permanent death (save of the redeemable, corrigible, resettable kind), and although one wants sex, one might well be inclined to exclude birth, generating children on demand. Maybe.

If we become the machine we do not, as in the Christian promise of reincarnation, get our obsolescence-prone bodies back? Have we not thereby perfected the body, as the last men would say, blinking, as Nietzsche tells us, as they say so. One might have taken that to mean that the last men do not mean what they say, or that they do not understand or that they merely guess at what they say. Maybe their blinking indicates only a temporary loss of power in the electrical grid. What is certain is that one motivation for the transhuman ideal would be found in its capacity to take us beyond the need to recharge our devices, the need to ensure that the power supply remains unbroken. And so we need Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Iran, etc.

In all this, the ethical question takes a back seat to the practical. Because we cannot quite effect the transhuman beyond the cheaper and fairly ontic details of contact lenses already mentioned and replacement knees and hips, we nonetheless spend an inordinate amount of time debating the value of doing the things we cannot do at levels well beyond our actual technical grasp. What matters is that and in our mind’s eye, we are already there. In fact, we have been there in this mind’s eye since before I was born.

No problem say those who argue, with Kurzweil at the forefront, that the technological singularity is one that accelerates exponentially, taking Moore’s Law not as a statistical generalization thus far and as applied to chips but as if it were a cosmic law of nature applicable to everything
we hope to overcome the immune limitations we currently face by sidestepping the same: this is the allure of stem-cell technology just in that such technology promises to allow us to do the straightforward transplants that we currently cannot manage without staggering requirements for immune-suppressors. So too, the point of cloning: not to reproduce Fluffy (once again, the cloned Fluffy II never looks like the original Fluffy save by the old fashioned breeder's means of taking the best of a horrifying number of clones [multiple pregnancies/whelps] coupled with desire and a pet owner's memory deficits) and much rather to "grow" bio-identical body parts that might not look the same, but should, if we are lucky, permit us to switch out body parts. (And only science fiction horror enthusiasts, in fiction and film, bother to reflect on the life of the clone that happens to bear those replacement parts for us.)

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By some worry that such transhuman elements as there will be will not be likely to be the legacy of all. And with Nietzsche, or more accurately with Ayn Rand, we might here ask why such elements should be enhancements for all? If humans will power, they will advancement, but if they will advancement, they will advancement as an advantage over all others.

What is the point of being transhuman if you are not thereby advanced to a position closer to the superior individual by contrast with others and for the sake of which, as Nietzsche suggests, everything in you should be directed?

As with education, transhumanism, just assuming all the obstacles noted can be overcome, cannot but be for those of us who have the means to assure our personal evolution, qua transhuman, and it is here that the parallel to education as we know it, in terms of human excellences, as in exemplars, as in habit, comes to an end. If one promises that, like cell phones, costs for transhuman enhancements will come down’ one participates in the lies of the privileged. Nor does everyone have a cell phone, nor has poverty been abolished even when it comes to bread and water promises to be the battle of the current century at least. The promised transformation of the human is not to be modeled on the advantages of youth and health or the competitive edge of learning not so much because there will likely be a financial bar to accessibility (although there surely will be that) but far more because it is also designed to be a departure from the lived, flesh and blood body. And that is nothing but the ascetic ideal again: anti-life, again. As Nietzsche once remarked, no sooner have we overcome the true world, than we find we have also surpassed the apparent one.

Here Sorgner might do well to return to his initial engagement with Bostrom. For Bostrom’s concerns, mapped out with all the care that befits someone who took his degree at the London School of Economics (ah, a cultural noble!) is what he calls, on the most physically metaphysical level one might suppose, existential risk. And risk is the heart of the point of existentialism as it mattered in its origins, not in Denmark but in Germany and above all in France, with the thought of death and not only of god’s abandonment all around one. I am speaking of Jaspers, of Bataille, Sartre, Camus.

Thus we overcome both body and soul.

This is evidence of the animus philosophy (and this includes science) seems to have contra life. Hence we recall Nietzsche’s arguments on technological, whereby the apparent absence of signs of such consummate final evolution is utterly consistent with the process.

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This is evidence of the animus philosophy (and this includes science) seems to have contra life. Hence we recall Nietzsche’s arguments on philosophy as anti-life. And here again I agree with Günther Anders, the very heretical critical theorist who was also at the same time that he was anti-Adorno, also an anti-Heideggerian (whereby, bien entendu, to be anti-anything always also includes what is opposed).

Anders had argued that if we are ‘ashamed,’ appalled, by our humanity it is because we find it deficient, and thus we mean to correct it. Transhumanism would only be the latest word for what Anders diagnosed: a precipitate conviction of a consumerist capitalist world-ethos. The obsolescence of the human is part and parcel of the obsolescence of everything else from music and film in the culture industry to the media we ‘consume’ rather than ‘enjoy.’

For my part, I still hear Nietzsche’s reflection at the end of The Gay Science section entitled, The Thought of Death. “It makes me happy that men’ do not want at all to think the thought of death! I should like very much to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing to them.” (GS §278)

Thus when we later read (towards the end of this the first edition of the Gay Science, Nietzsche will take until 1887 to finish the second and final edition) of what Nietzsche speaks of as the “humaneness of the future,” I take the idea of humaneness here very much as I believe Sorgner would, as the happiness of a single feeling, not an immortality (the entire passage is shot through with the need to think mortality somehow, like the sun at evening) as such but exactly as one “whose horizon encompasses thousands of years past and future,” all contained “in a single soul and a single feeling, the happiness of a god, full of power and love, full of tears and laughter.” (GS §337)

Shall we call this “enhancement”? Is this single soul with its singular single feeling, denominated by Nietzsche as the “happiness of a god,” the transhuman? I do not think that Sorgner would find it difficult to argue this. And why not? Can we not imagine such a being as an avatar in any of the computer games one can play for fun (one’s own pleasure) and profit (of course and always and even when the game has our own players’ input, someone else’s profit).

For Nietzsche, joy is not in saving, keeping, or preserving life. Joy is dispensation: the sun at evening as Nietzsche writes: blessing everything with gold. The emphasis is not the gold we immediately seek to literalize. Like Pindar who lyrically declared ‘water is best,’ the gold of the sun at evening is gold on the water, as in the Venice Nietzsche liked to visit, when afternoon turns to evening and “even the poorest fisherman rows with golden oars.” (GS §337) Like the happiness of that ‘bright star,’ all happiness is giving out, expression, gift. In question is less the issue of
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how one might overcome humanity (Nietzsche teaches that the human being must go under) and thus it is less a call to live as a god lives: a deathless life — the point is tied to Nietzsche’s melancholy (and Northern) insight that all gods die — than and much rather the singularization of recurrence in each event: “Do you desire this, once more and innumerable times more?” (GS §341) If one might argue that this is compatible with the transhuman as eternal circuit, eternal loop — it still leaves us where we started.

Notes

1 This metaphysical ‘exceptionalism’ is one of the reasons that Nick Bostrom can begin his “History of Transhuman Thought” with a discussion of titanic myth, including the theft of Prometheus, as well as the Epic of Gilgamesh and the dream of immortality. See Bostrom (2005).
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21 Anonymity or net-privacy turns out to be less about surfing porn sites than it is about the content that becomes the product that is deep date, i.e., the venality of Microsoft and Sony and Apple who wish to be secure (as they already know everything you look at) their right to charge you for it, thus getting their cut from any piece of software you use, anytime you use it, as of anything you look at, download, or share online each and every time you look at it, download, share it.
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25 Sorgner cites Nicklas Bostrom (2005b, 1). Bostrom, whose work is already cited above, teaches philosophy at Oxford University and is the Director of the Future of Humanity Institute. He is also editor with Julian Savulescu of a 2009 book on Human Enhancement and takes the notion of the “post-human” condition about as literally as one might wish. For one overview of transhumanism as a concept see Agar (2007) as well as Bostrom (2003b). Note that discussion continues to be heavily influenced by N. Katherine Hayles’s 1999 How We Became Posthuman as well as and in addition to Turkle’s early work, Mark Poster’s 1990 study: The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context.
26 Sorgner (2009, 30).
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27 Ibid., 32.

28 Sorgner (2009, 33).
31 I hardly oppose the broadly metonymic to the literalist rendering of posthumanism and I use the latter terminology in a related context with reference to both Umberto Eco and Nietzsche in Babich (1990) and not less to render the nuances of the concept of Nietzsche's Übermensch in Babich (1994, 12ff).


33 Ibid., 40.

34 See Jaron Lanier’s 2010 You Are Not A Gadget. It is relevant to the present context that in response to an email inquiry I sent regarding the argument I seek to develop here, Lanier’s first response was the exclamation, “Yikes, Nietzsche studies!” And “Yikes” is the sort of comment that obviously speaks volumes.


36 See for a discussion of Sloterdijk related to these issues, Babich (2011b).

37 In: Alliez (2007, 319). Note that and inasmuch as Günther was employed by several US government agencies, Günther’s Das Bewusstsein der Maschinen (1957) is at least accessible in part in English, e.g.— and note again the science fiction locus — in the pulp magazine, Starting Stories, Günther (1953). Contemporary scholars may find this reference of interest more because of a hoped for resonance, say with Simondon, or owing to an interest in Ray Kurzweil’s mystical vision of technology in Kurzweil (2006). A product in a consummate fashion of the last century, born in the same year’s but dying in the Orwellian year of 1984, Günther, an enthusiastically pro-American German could not have been less Orwellian is worth our attention in any case as a useful guide to what might have been hoped for as a result of possible logics in the wake of Gödel’s challenge to the same and Gödel was interested in Günther’s outline of non-Aristotelian logic (1959). But see too Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2000).

38 Thus it is worth noting that Sloterdijk also discusses thinking on the philosophy of technology in the today more esoteric than not philosophic writers on technology, such as Rathaus, Freyer, Türe, Jünger, Dessauer, etc., in the latter pages of Sloterdijk’s 1987 Critique of Cynical Reason.


40 Warren McCulloch is the author of Embodiments of Mind (1965). See for an astonishing reading idealizing cybernetics, here qua proto-cognitive science, and psychoanalysis, including a passing swipe at psychiatry (the latter as much for its circularity as its cupidity), McCulloch’s The Past of a Delusion (1953). McCulloch trained as a physician and studied psychoanalysis with Ferenczi, challenges Freud’s unconscious in economic terms, rather as Adolf Grünbaum has sought to do in related ventures in the Pittsburgh tradition of the philosophy of science. Where McCulloch supposed that one needed to integrate new understandings into the account of the mind, suggesting that one “contrast Freud’s delusion with the sad humility of Sherrington, who though he knows more physiology of brains that any other Englishman, admitted that for him in this world, Mind goes more ghostly than a ghost.” (1953, 21–22), his real objection turned upon the foundation of what he called Freud’s “delusion” (and thus the title of McCulloch’s essay), i.e., psychoanalysis: “One of the cornerstones of Freud’s delusions is that we forget no
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Bye Bye Birdie

Luigi pirandello (1926), “return to the theater of the absurd.”
he does hold a doctorate from Cambridge for his 1999 *The Mitochondrial Free Radical Theory of Aging*. See also Harman (1956).

49 The scenario should be familiar to those who might have been watching *Star Trek* which also began as a television series in the same year: 1966, or to those who had been watching the science fiction films of the 1950s or reading *Fantastic Stories*.

50 But for a critical overview that also applies to Kurzweil’s prediction of the coming ‘technological singularity,’ see Richard A. L. Jones, a professor of physics at Sheffield University, (2008) and (2004).

51 See, on toilets, Ivan Illich’s important 1985 study, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*.

52 See for a (very) truncated account Babich (2014).


54 European advocates of such ideals of educational ‘excellence’ tend to focus on Princeton, or Yale, or Harvard, somehow missing the hundreds of thousands and even millions of tuition-driven, for-pay or profit institutions as these abound at every level of post-secondary education in the United States. As for me, I’d compare CUNY or SUNY or the University of California system to private schools, even top tier schools, any day — if not of course when it comes to prestige as that is a market and class affair, but indeed and when it comes to education. The more critical point here is that European fantasies about private schools tend to suppose that all private schools work like so-called ‘top-tier’ schools. Ivan Illich already put paid to this assumption more broadly in his criticism of school as such. For references and discussion, see, among the other essays which I recommend in the same respective book collections, (Babich 2011b) as well as Babich (2009a).


56 By contrast Heidegger’s “HumanismustBrief” is written against such a presupposition. See Sartre’s *L’existentialism est un humanisme* and compare the two with Sloterdijk’s controversial Elmau lecture: *Regeln für den Menschenpark*. Some of this discussion draws upon points I make in Babich (2011c).

57 Babich (2006, 166ff) as well as Babich (2011a, 124ff).

58 See for a current overview and discussion, Sparrow (2011).

59 See, for example, Bostrom (2003a).


61 All scholars hailing from schools left out (present author included) may weep on cue.

62 Think old model iPhones, available for next to nothing (and, of course, a contract). Gotcha. And that is a gotcha when the decidedly desirable iPhone7 is the current model but customers are already anticipating the iPhone8 …

63 Many commentators have explored the question of what Nietzsche thinks to animate the conventional dream of such a better world, at least on the surface of it,
Chapter Eight

'shelter,' to care, to feed, to protect the lives of animals but as holding institutions for the purpose of killing them.

73 No one to date has answered the critical challenges of Thomas Szasz (1974) or (1978) or (1994). See too Szasz' study of Karl Kraus and the Soul-Doctors, Szasz, (1976).

74 Moore's law was formulated by Gordon Moore, cofounder of Intel, and predicts that the number of transistors that can be placed on chip will double every two years. With modifications and extensions, the "law" has been extended. Intriguingly, Paolo Gargini, director of technology strategy at Intel had already pointed to a limit. Cf. Zhimov et al. (2003) and (2008). Moore himself, intriguingly, does not share Kurzweil's optimism, and predicts that the "rapture" will take place: "Never." See sidebar on the last page of Jones' 2008 article, "Rupturing The Nanotech Rapture" cited above.

75 See for a discussion of our tendency to get in the way of any estimation of future risks Čirković, et al. (with Bostrom), (2010) as well as Bostrom's (2009).

76 Games are not played for free, computers are not free, nor is access to the internet free and so on, multiply that anyway one likes if one cares to "upgrade." And the newer models for licensing software take such costs still further (plus costs across platforms, 'cloud' computing, the need to have a desktop and a laptop (or at least one or the other), and an iPad and a cell phone entail proliferation of gadgets to do the same thing, differently, with payments to different entities). Cheap, ontic details turn out to be less than 'cheap.' And here the concern goes a good deal beyond matters of access or supposed 'affordability.'

Chapter Nine

ZARATHUSTRA 2.0 AND BEYOND:
FURTHER REMARKS ON THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NIETZSCHE AND TRANSHUMANISM

STEFAN LORENZ SORGNER

After the intense debate concerning the relationship between Nietzsche, European Posthumanisms and Transhumanism, which has taken place in three issues of the Journal of Evolution and Technology (Vol. 20, issue 1; Vol. 21, issues 1 and 2), and in this issue of "The Agonist", the exchange has entered the realm of Nietzsche scholarship. I regard this as an important step given the relevance of the questions which have been raised by transhumanists. Due to the close structural similarity between Nietzsche's philosophy and many transhumanists' reflections, for which I argued at least, an exchange between the two discourses can be of great use for scholars of both topics. As Nietzsche scholarship is related to the tradition of continental philosophy and transhumanists' reflections are most closely connected to analytical ethics exchanges and the Anglo-American Utilitarian (Mill) and evolutionary theory (Darwin) tradition, experts of both disciplines do not usually meet and argue with one another. I hope the following reflections and arguments will make it even more obvious that there is a structural similarity between the views of Nietzsche and those of transhumanists, even though the sound in which they put forward their understandings of the world differs significantly. The inspiring articles by Babich and Loeb provide an excellent basis for clarifying some specific issues, which are closely related to the debate, so that the views of Nietzsche and those of transhumanists become clearer. In addition, I use some insights gained from these exchanges to put forward new perspectives and values by developing further selected arguments that have been put forward by Nietzsche as well as by transhumanists.