

Sex and transhumanism

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## SEX AND TRANSHUMANISM

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### *Abstract*

In this article, the transhumanist project is analyzed through the lens of one of the phenomena characterizing human existence, *i.e.* sex. The aim of the article is to reconstruct the ontological structure of transhumanism employing the reflection on the phenomenon of sex and, based on this reconstruction, to prepare the conceptual fundament for the most theoretically justified ethical treatment of the transhumanist project. The genealogical studies by Michel Foucault and historical-ontological research by Ian Hacking are used as the theoretical basis and methodological guideline for the analysis carried out in the article. The analysis demonstrates that due to the ontologically 'mobile' nature of the main object of transhumanism (the human), transhumanism itself unfolds as a project that is constantly shifting in terms of its purposes and goals. Therefore, transhumanism is a project that cannot be realized in practice in principle. The impossibility of realizing the transhumanist project, consequently provides an ethically engaged treatment thereof. The article is concluded by stating transhumanism to be a nihilistic ideology – or, paradoxically, an ideology without an ideal – which actually does not manifest as the improvement of the human, but only as their perpetual identity and anthropological remaking based on new ever emerging techno-scientific capabilities.

*Key words:* transhumanism; sex; science; technology; Foucault; Hacking.

Back in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the well-known English scientist Julian Huxley put forward the idea that the existing human nature could potentially be radically remade while simultaneously improving the whole of humanity with the assistance of scientific and technological knowledge. Huxley's insights are currently attracting

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increasing academic and public interest. The idea of transhumanism has been widely analyzed in scientific research, expressed in artistic pieces, and has also become a part of political agendas<sup>2</sup>. It is the latter which demonstrates that the idea of transhumanism has a strong project-oriented potential. Not only has this idea been treated as an object of philosophical considerations, there have also been intensive searches for technological and sociopolitical ways to realize it in practice as well.

It is noteworthy that opposite ethical camps have formed in relation to the phenomenon of transhumanism. One of those camps, represented by transhumanism apologists (many of them can be named simply as 'transhumanists'), emphasizes the advantages of transhumanism as a project of remaking the human. The other one, represented by the critics of transhumanism, the so-called 'bioconservatives', point out the threats to humans and to the whole of humanity that may arise from the transhumanist project. Despite these differences, none of these camps is inclined to doubt the possibility of the practical realization of the idea of transhumanism. The ethical issues of transhumanism are not directly touched upon in this article. Moreover, the aim of this article is not to find the answer to the question of which of these ethical positions – transhumanist or bioconservative – is more justified. The analysis carried out in this article has a different goal. It is to reconstruct the ontological structure of transhumanism as an analytical perspective using the phenomenon of sex, *i.e.* one of the existential elements, which is characteristic of the human, and based on this reconstruction, to open the possibility for the most theoretically grounded ethical treatment of transhumanism<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Evidence for the readily increasing social and political significance of transhumanism can be clearly seen in the fact that an increasing number of political parties on a global scale are determined to present transhumanist ideas directly or at least respond to it in their political programs. The growing significance of these ideas and their intensifying development on a political level is clearly testified by the presence of studies that are devoted to the analysis of political parties representing the transhumanist worldview (*e.g.*, see Szabados 2018).

<sup>3</sup> This article relies on certain research insights and results of the doctoral dissertation prepared and defended by the author of the article, devoted to the analysis of the idea of transhumanism from the perspective of historical ontology (Markuckas 2022). Thus, the analysis carried out in the article can be treated as, on the one hand, the presentation of

First of all, this article is directed at the aforementioned goal because an ethically oriented research of transhumanism can only be conducted after a detailed analysis of ontological structure thereof. It is precisely for this reason that the analysis carried out in the article is focused on the ontological aspects of transhumanism rather than the ethical ones. As the theoretical basis and as a methodological guideline of the analysis, the genealogical studies by Michel Foucault and historical-ontological research by Ian Hacking have been chosen.

### **The Transhumanist Project: Its Idealistic and Realistic Aspects**

In the rapidly growing field of transhumanism studies, it would indeed be difficult, if possible at all, to detect an aspect of transhumanism that has not yet received the attention of researchers. However, extensive research on transhumanism – including the analysis and assessment of both theoretical and practical aspects of the transhumanist project – hardly helps in finding an answer to the most fundamental question: what is transhumanism? Current works on transhumanism are lacking consensus not only on how transhumanism should be defined or elucidated, but also what essential practical goals should be ascribed to the transhumanist project.

On the one hand, transhumanism is presented as a particularly ambitious project, which is focused on the radical remaking of the existing human, and which should actually manifest as the elimination of all physical and mental limitations in humans. This overcoming of current human anthropological characteristics would be so profound that it would ultimately enable the transformation of a human into a new kind of entity – the so-called 'posthuman'. Some theorists of transhumanism have pointed out that there are only different visions of what the future posthuman will be like or what form its existence will take in practice (Bostrom 2003, 5; Ranisch, Sorgner 2014, 8). However,

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the main ideas of the research conducted in the aforementioned dissertation, and, on the other hand, as the further elaboration of some of its theoretical aspects, primarily in order to explicate in more detail the fundamental link between the necessity of cognizing the ontological structure of transhumanism and the justification of its ethical treatment.

these visions usually emphasize the invulnerability of the new future entity by comparing it with the existing human who is imperfect by their nature and accordingly is existentially vulnerable. Following the so-called attitude of 'epistemological certainty', transhumanists are convinced that virtually all natural human vulnerabilities along with their fundamental imperfection can be eliminated by means of scientific and technological knowledge (Ross 2020, 17). In many works of transhumanism apologists, the biological fact of human mortality is presented as the most fundamental limitation of the human being. Therefore, the most ambitious goal of the transhumanist project is to take control of the various biological processes that lead to human suffering (*e.g.*, arresting aging, eradicating various diseases, etc.), which, in turn, would eventually allow a human to become an immortal being.

On the other hand, even admitting that this image of the transhumanist project as directed at the transformation of the human into an almost 'divine', or absolutely invulnerable and flawless entity, really prevails in the presentations oriented to catch the attention of broader society, although it should be noted that there are also those apologists of transhumanism who tend to treat such visions just as a poor advertisement trick. They attempt to present the transhumanism project in a much more restrained or 'realistic'<sup>4</sup> manner, looking at it from a contemporary perspective. Rather than 'idealistically' proving, for example, that it is possible to turn a human into an immortal being, these transhumanism apologists orientate their theoretical efforts in another direction trying to demonstrate that the cutting-edge technology and the newest scientific knowledge can be successfully used to 'upgrade' the human, creating a more 'flourishing' personal and social existence. Therefore, in the works of such renowned researchers of transhumanism as Nick Bostrom or Stefan Sorgner, the question of whether a human can really become immortal receives much less attention than the question of if or how it is possible to extend a full-fledged existence of a human

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Sorgner, who can be reasonably treated as one of the most prominent apologists of such 'realistic' transhumanism, characterizes the idea of immortality prevailing in transhumanist discourse just as an 'advertising tool' of transhumanism and, in turn, presents his own theoretical efforts as 'a defense of non-utopian version of transhumanism' (Sorgner 2022, 6–7).

who would remain healthy and enjoying the varied pleasures of life for a much longer time than the current conditions of their existence allow to do (*e.g.*, see Bostrom 2008; Sorgner 2022).

It would be reasonable to consider whether this ‘realistic’ presentation of transhumanism is not just another advertising strategy. Such a strategy is aimed at the consolidation of the idea that the remaking of the existing human into a less vulnerable being capable of achieving a better existential state is not only possible, but desired by most people as well. It is really hard to deny that one of the greatest fears of humans is the fear of death. Thomas Hobbes, one of the fathers of modern philosophy, had emphasized this fact. In his famous book *Leviathan*, Hobbes attributed the essential characteristic of fear of death to humans and grounded his own social and political theory on the basis of this characteristic. In its turn, it explains why some proponents of transhumanism (‘idealists’ of transhumanism) tend to present transhumanism as an ambitious effort to make humans immortal. However, Hobbes was not only talking about the fact that people fear death and therefore they are inclined to be social or even sacrifice some of their natural freedom in order to create and maintain a public and civic apparatus – the state. Hobbes also drew attention to the fact that people behave in this way because they pursue ‘ease’ and ‘sensual delight’ (Hobbes 1965, 76).

In a Hobbesian manner, the ‘realists’ of transhumanism emphasizes that in everyday life, people tend to reflect not on death, but how to avoid all kinds of discomfort and suffering, to experience as many joyous events in life as possible, to remain alive and healthy. As we go about our lives, we seek all sorts of ways to enrich our daily existence as much as possible—or, to put it in Hobbes’ terms, to make life easier and more pleasant. This assumption is supported by research showing that aging people, whose lives have become more complex, less self-controlled, lonely, and increasingly dependent on the will and efforts of others, who lose some of the human life pleasures and needs, such as the ability to communicate, feeling needed, etc., tend to view death much more favorably (*e.g.* see Rurup, Pasman, *et al.* 2011). For reasons close to the latter, *i.e.* emphasizing the suffering and disabilities caused by various diseases, the loss of one’s personal identity and the fear of the future, some people also ground their support for the option of ending life

voluntarily with the assistance of medical staff for anyone who has lost the joy of their existence and is drowning in constant misery (e.g. see Pearlman, Hsu, *et al.* 2005).

This suggests that it is not just 'life', but namely 'the good life' is what most people really value. As is well known, since at least the time of the ancient Greeks, the question on the essence of 'a good life' has been raised and intensively debated in philosophy. It is clear that the Platonic Socrates and Protagoras would have never fully agreed on that what constitutes the good. Therefore, it is not surprising that this debate in philosophy still exists. Truly, in the paradigm of transhumanist thinking, which, like Hobbes's philosophy, is based on a materialistic view of the human, the above-mentioned question on the 'a good life' does not take the form of such sharp discussions and accordingly presupposes a fairly clear answer. The old Hobbes and most of the transhumanists of our day share the common association – through turning their thinking in a materialistic direction all over – between relating the human well-being entirely with various parameters of human physical existence and the possibility of transforming these parameters. This principle is clearly revealed in the works of proponents of 'realistic' transhumanism. On the one hand, these works noticeably avoid considering, for example, the most fundamental human existential goals or the role of human mortality within the constitution of human existence. In this respect, Sorgner's book *We Have Always Been Cyborgs* is representative. There, Sorgner simply acknowledges the existing plurality of aspirations and ideals in human lives (Sorgner 2022, 135–138). On the other hand, in such 'realistically-oriented' works it is clearly emphasized that one of the most, if not the most, important goals of transhumanism is as aimed at the remaking of humans maximizing the extension of their health span, but not just life span.

Of course, like almost every concept in the field of philosophical reflection, the concept of 'health' is constituted by a complex discursive as well. Therein, the content of this concept is intensively contested and includes such broad currents of philosophical thinking as the philosophy of medicine and the philosophy of healthcare. So, it is not surprising that there are many different conceptions and definitions of health. However, without going into a more detailed analysis of this large field

of discussion of the concept of health, in this article it will be enough to note that in the aforementioned field prevails the general idea that health is much more than physical and psychological human wellness. This idea is clearly presented in the definition of health provided by the World Health Organization (1946 [1948]), where it is stated that health is the state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not just the absence of disease or infirmity. It should be noted that such a concept of health is clearly characteristic of the theoretical approaches of Bostrom and Sorgner. While presenting and discussing the transhumanist project through the perspective of extending the human health span, they refer, on the one hand, to those elements of human existence that testify to the fact of a person being physically undamaged by disease and infirmity, and, on the other hand, to those that clearly attest to their mental and social well-being as the ability to enjoy oneself and other persons, through a physically and mentally fulfilling coexistence with them. Looking from the transhumanist perspective, the phenomenon of sex can be treated as such an existential element, which combines these two strands of the comprehension of the phenomenon of health, and which accordingly helps transhumanists to present their notion of a healthy, life-fulfilling human condition in a 'realistic', or understandable way, even to those people, who by nature are not very imaginative or future-minded.

### **Sex as a Tool for the Representation of Transhumanism**

Zoltan Istvan, a futurist and renowned researcher of transhumanism, who also makes great efforts to apply the ideas of transhumanism at the social and political level<sup>5</sup>, claims that transhumanism has long focused on technology that ensures improved health and extended longevity (Istvan 2014). However, according to Istvan, we should not forget that in the future, transhumanism will make some of our most cherished

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<sup>5</sup> Istvan is the founder of the world's most famous political party representing the transhumanist worldview, the *Transhumanist Party* in the United States of America. He also ran as a candidate in the election campaign for the President of the United States of America in 2016.



experiences – such as sex – much more fun and enjoyable. Here, Istvan discusses the specific technological devices that are already being developed, from microchip implants to exoskeleton suits, demonstrating that with the development of transhumanism the horizon of human sexual experiences will also expand. It should be noted that in the context of the implementation of the transhumanism project, the question of evolving sexual experiences is receiving attention not only from Istvan, but also from other researchers, who intensively consider how the novel technology will affect the phenomenon of sex, as well as the human existence (*e.g.* Haylock 2017; Schussler 2017; Hauskeller 2014).

Although it may appear that questions relating to the phenomenon of sex and raised in the context of transhumanism are only technologically engaged, this view would certainly be too narrow. It is true that the phenomenon of sex in studies of transhumanism is analyzed to better understand, for example, how the process of sex would look in the future or how through the technological development evolving sexual practices could transform our attitude towards sex itself. Nevertheless, such analyzes are also carried out in order to better elucidate and present the very idea of transhumanism. Moreover, through problematising the phenomenon of sex, ethically engaged evaluative positions in relation to transhumanism can be formed and expressed.

Reflection on sex thus enables both the apologetics of transhumanism and its critique. It should be conceded that there are still not many works where the phenomenon of sex is used as a tool for the analysis of transhumanism. However, in this growing specific thematic field it is already possible to see the existing difference between the bioconservative and transhumanist approaches, which also structurizes the entire transhumanist discourse. At the same time, it should be noted that although the aforementioned distinction can be observed, the analysis of the phenomenon of sex is still more intensely used to justify the relevance or necessity of the transhumanist project, but not to engage critically with it.

While representing their stance, the apologists of transhumanism exploit linguistic motifs and images associated with sex. This is not a simple coincidence. As mentioned before, by following materialistic

anthropology transhumanists perceive the human only as a corporeal being, who, just similarly like other beings of nature, desires a life that is as pleasant, long-lasting and joyful as possible. Of course, as John Stuart Mill has made it clear a few centuries ago, and as at least some proponents of transhumanism agree, the pleasures that make up human happiness are actually different in its quality (Mill 2009, 19). Based on the aforementioned, it could be argued that despite the tendency of cultural posthumanism to provide intensive critique of the dualistic and hierarchical approach to reality, which through the idea of hybridization also spreads in the paradigm of transhumanist thinking (for example, in rejecting the ontological distinctions between humans and technology, as well as humans and animals), we still live in a cultural context, where it is accepted, as in the times of Mill, that the satisfaction of a human can hardly be compared or equated with the satisfaction of a pig.

On the other hand, even if it is stated that there are indeed significant differences between the existence of humans and other, it should also be noted that in the works of the proponents of transhumanism, these are mentioned only in exceptional cases and not discussed in a detailed manner. While the human is sometimes recognized as possessing intellectual or moral qualities that distinguish them from other beings living in the world, this does not change the general anthropological direction of transhumanist thinking, which aims to reduce the human to a pure biological being, whose main existential goal is to experience as many physiologically-determined pleasures as intensely as possible. It is for this reason the references found in apologetically-oriented works of transhumanism to the limitedness of our current sexual experiences and the possibility to enhance it technologically or to grow sexual capacities in people (Bostrom 2003, 18; Sorgner 2022, 7, 12) cannot be considered as a mere advertising trick intended to make academic publications on transhumanism catchier for the readers or enticing them to become excited about the idea of transhumanism. Looking at these references from a broader perspective of transhumanist thinking, they should be considered as constituting the transhumanist anthropology, which assumes that only a person who is able of enjoying various pleasures (including the pleasure of sex) can be treated as a free and unlimited being, capable of experiencing the fullness and perfection of existence.

### **Sex and the Ontological Problematicity of Transhumanism**

In the works of transhumanism apologists the phenomenon of sex is used in order to present the transhumanist project positively. There, sex acts as a tool to convey the message about the most important aim of transhumanism to transform the human state as blessed as possible. Likewise, it helps to establish the anthropological attitude that this state in particular, where people are able to enjoy pleasures unlimitedly, most adequately responds their existential interests and allows them to realize the existential human potential at a maximum scope. Without denying the element of rationality behind such an attitude or by agreeing in principle that human happiness may also be related to the experience of bodily structured pleasures, the analysis carried out in this article demonstrates that the phenomenon of sex may be used not only for transhumanism apologetics, but also for critique thereof.

Thinking about transhumanism from a critically-oriented stance and employing the phenomenon of sex as an analytical perspective, it is expedient to consider Foucault's works. Foucault skeptically looked at the idea rising from the paradigm of humanistic thinking that it is possible to acquire objective knowledge of the human and, and accordingly establish guidelines of ethical behavior and a sociopolitical state responding to 'true' human nature. Foucault was sure that there is no reason to talk about the 'true' human – or 'human in itself'. According to Foucault, such efforts to truly define the human only represent discourse prevailing at a specific historical time, or in his own terms, a certain 'regime of truth'. Therefore, in the work *The Order of Things*, which is devoted to the consideration of the ontological state of human sciences, Foucault declares that "[t]o all those who still wish to talk about man [...] to all those who asks themselves questions about what man is in his essence [...] to all those who refer all knowledge back to the truths of man himself [...] to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can answer only with a philosophical laugh – which means, to a certain extent, a silent one." (Foucault 2004, 373).

In the context of transhumanism analysis, should be emphasized that this insight by Foucault can be applied not only to all classical philosophically-grounded anthropological views and visions, but also

to the modern scientific and expert knowledge constituting the comprehension of the current human on which the transhumanist project is based. Foucault began his own genealogical research explicating from the point that knowledge cannot be distinguished from the relations of power and that knowledge accordingly spreads as a process of subjective construction of reality rather than a process of objective cognition of it, by accepting only the truths that conform to the prevailing regime of truth. In this regard, Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* should be considered as an especially important work. Here, Foucault employs the phenomenon of sex as a core of analysis, and genealogically explicates the constitutive power of scientific knowledge, both to the reality and to the human as an integral part of it. By analyzing scientific works on human sexuality of the 18-19th centuries, Foucault convincingly demonstrated that from the time that experts took an interest in the phenomenon of sex, and our conception of sexuality became controlled by the prevailing desirable social 'ideal', which also can be presented in the name of 'norm' in accordance to the broadening tendency of modernity to assess all aspects of social reality through the lens of statistically-oriented thinking, our sexual practices are highly determined of certain knowledge intimately related with biopolitical goals (Foucault 1978, 115–133).

Through the use of the genealogical method in explicating the constitutive nature of the scientific and expert knowledge towards the human and reality, while also demonstrating how such knowledge forms 'appropriate' models of human behavior, Foucault clearly disclosed that historically evolving knowledge transforms the field of possibilities of conceptualization of various social phenomena and simultaneously reveals completely new horizons of 'ideality' (or 'normality') thereof. All these processes were also thoroughly analyzed in the historical-ontological research carried out by the philosopher of science Ian Hacking, a follower of Foucault's ideas. Hacking uses the conception of the 'moving target' to emphasize the dependence of peoples self-comprehension and their behavior on historically evolving scientific and expert knowledge (Hacking 2007). The aforementioned conception in the context of Hacking's philosophy is also employed to highlight epistemological and ontological differences between objects of

natural sciences and human sciences, which are accordingly named as 'natural kinds' and 'human kinds'. Hacking describes human kinds as 'interactive' and natural kinds as 'indifferent'. By stating these differences, Hacking emphasizes that scientifically-oriented language applied to humans has a very different ontological effect than, for instance, for a quark. Unlike quarks, people are conscious beings so they react to the scientific-expert language describing them (Hacking 1999, 59; 105). On the basis of these descriptions and the reactions sparked thereof, peoples' self-comprehension and behavior is changing. To put it in broader anthropological terms, it could be said that during this process even the conception of the human is transformed. This is why humans should be treated epistemologically and ontologically as 'moving targets' rather than 'stable objects'. Similarly to the views of Foucault, it accordingly enables to state that due to the characteristic of humans to be epistemologically and ontologically 'mobile', it is impossible in principle to provide their 'objective' scientific description.

These conceptual resources found in the fields of social philosophy and philosophy of science can be employed in order to reconstruct the ontological nature of transhumanism. As previously mentioned in this article, transhumanism is based on the fundamental premise that science and technology will eventually have the capability to overcome all vulnerabilities of humans and could even transform the human into a new kind of being altogether, enjoying one's existence without the yoke of any limitations. Such huge trust in science characterizing transhumanism, despite the fact of existing variety of its notions, for example, discussed comprehensively by Sorgner (2022, 129–138), enables us to consider transhumanism as the successor of Renaissance and Enlightenment humanism. Both humanism and transhumanism as ideological projects emerging from the aforementioned historical and cultural epochs, share the focus on the radical 'improvement' of the human, as well as the social state. These projects are grounded on the belief that this can be achieved by developing and applying scientific knowledge. On the other hand, humanism and transhumanism are clearly distinguished from each other by the 'implements' they offer to eliminate human imperfection. The most prominent humanists believed in the classical power of education, while the contemporary transhumanists place their greatest

hope in the use of the latest technology. It is the reason why the presentation of transhumanism as 'humanism on Viagra' – as described by Sorgner (2015) in one of his TEDx talks – is by no means just a catchy and easily remembered rhetorical figure helping to better understand the relationship between humanism and transhumanism. First of all, such a presentation of transhumanism conveys it essentially as a technologically mediated project aimed at increasing existential potential of the human.

However, when this fundamental goal of transhumanism is reflected on through the lens of Foucault and Hacking's explication of the enormous significance of science in constituting the phenomenon of humanness, it does not take long to expose the conceptual and practical problematicity of this project. The problematicity arises from the fact that scientific and technological knowledge substantiating transhumanism is not 'solid', but 'liquid'. Accordingly, the roots of the ontological 'fruits', such as the conception of the human, as well as the notions of their capacities and vulnerabilities, which 'grow' in the soil of this knowledge, are not strong. They just do not have any stable metaphysical ground where to root more firmly. This is due to the nature of modern knowledge itself. As is well known, the knowledge from the perspective of modernity is treated as continuously progressing, and the progress of knowledge is highly praised by all supporters of transhumanism. As the knowledge base changes in the constant process of history, even if it is conceptualized as 'progress', the roots ripening the aforementioned ontological fruits are inevitably cut off. Bearing all this in mind, we need to raise the question: if then is it possible at all to reach any 'ideal' or even to assess objectively the 'improvement' of the human?

Sex can help to explain the importance of the raised question in more detail, highlighting the grand ontological challenge confronting the transhumanist project. It is enough to take a look at how our attitude towards sex has changed in the course of history. There is no doubt that throughout the history of mankind, sex has been one of the greatest physical pleasures that a person can experience, and this is still the case in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, in spite of this historically stable fact of the pleurability of sex, the treatment of the sex phenomenon itself – through the prism of the actualization of the fullness of human existence – has undoubtedly undergone historical

changes. To prove this, we can refer to the beginning of Plato's *Republic*, *i.e.*, the philosophical masterpiece that for many centuries ahead, reaching even modern philosophical thought, has established the notion of a human as a rational being. There, occurs a conversation between Cephalus and Socrates. Cephalus, who is on the 'age's threshold' during this conversation makes a point to Socrates and the other listeners that as old age sets a person free from unnecessary passions, that person acquires complete peace. Cephalus employs the words of poet Sophocles to express his attitude. According to him, when someone once asked Sophocles, "how is he as far as sex goes and can he still make love to a woman", Sophocles replied with the words that "he is very glad to have escaped from all that, like a slave who had escaped from a deranged and savage master" (Plato 2004, 329a).

It should be admitted that these words written by Plato sound rather strange, in the context of current culture structured by the growing social importance of the transhumanist project and the idea of 'humanism on Viagra' defining thereof. This is primarily because contemporary humans are constituted, *i.e.* look at themselves and the surrounding world through the prism of different knowledge and existential possibilities based on it. Today, people have access to all kinds of technology (including in the form of certain medications, such as the Viagra, if we are talking specifically about men), which enable them to remain sexually active and enjoy sex for an unlimited period of life. Perhaps many modern people would not agree with Cephalus' view that, in this way, they only drown in unnecessary passions and lose their peace. Even more so, it is wondered if anyone today would agree with the self-improvement actions allegedly performed by the famous Greek philosopher Democritus, who, as it was said in ancient times, has recognized his own weakness in the sense that he could not look at women without experiencing disturbing desires, and decided to destroy his vision (perhaps as a technology using a bronze sun-reflecting mirror directed at eyes) to correct it (Chitwood 2004, 119).

However, despite all these doubts, we should still debate whether by improving one aspect of our existence, we are at risk of impoverishing another. Just by observing such doubts, there is reason to consider whether the ideal of human 'improvement' intensely proclaimed by

the transhumanist project is only the 'servicing' of the specific 'regime of truth' on the human prevailing in a certain historical time. In relation to the human, such servicing manifests as a coercive techno-scientifically-oriented social practice, which, by inseparably combining the idea of human perfection with technological progress and the application of the latest technology in regard to the individual, focuses on their identity or even anthropological remaking. At the same time, it must be considered whether this inevitably restricts the field of possibilities of comprehension of human perfection, as the variety of which is an important, if not the main, condition of human freedom. All these considerations are based on the in this article already elucidated fact that the fundamentally different conceptions of the human and their powers and vulnerabilities dominate in different historical and cultural epochs. Accordingly, these anthropological visions cannot be reconsolidated each to another because they are grounded on the different scientific and technological capabilities (or 'knowledge') enabling to conceptualize the human.

A transhumanist paradigm of thinking that avoids such kind of considerations can reasonably be described as 'ontologically naïve', employing the phrase elucidating the ontological stance of transhumanism as proposed by Thomas D. Philbeck (2014, 180)<sup>6</sup>. The relevance of such description is determined by the fact that the transhumanist thinking tends to 'objectify' the human in the old humanistic manner and, on that

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<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that in the works of at least some supporters of transhumanism, it is emphasized that transhumanism should be treated rather from a 'liquid' than 'stable' perspective of ontology. For example, Sorgner devotes considerable analytical attention to the relationship between transhumanist thinking and the ontology of becoming in presenting his conception of transhumanism (Sorgner 2022). Regardless, it in no way eliminates and, to the contrary, even reveals in a more vivid manner the contradictoriness of transhumanist thinking arising from, on the one hand, persistent attempts to suggest that the existing ontological boundaries of the human can indeed be 'transcended', remaking them into a 'higher' kind of being (which is precisely what the categories of 'transhuman' or 'posthuman' denote) and, on the other hand, the recognition that the human is a constantly ontologically changing (or 'becoming') being, without any clearly fixed ontological boundaries. In turn, the problem of the contradictoriness of the idea of transhumanism was analyzed in detail in the doctoral dissertation of the author of this article (Markuckas 2022).



basis, announce the possibility of fundamental human 'improvement'. Transhumanism apologists do not consider enough the circumstance which caught the attention not only of Foucault, Hacking or Philbeck, but also of Yoni Van Den Eede (2015) – *i.e.* that the ontological structure of the human is 'moving' historically, or undergoes profound transformations alongside changes in scientific and technological knowledge. Consequently, the lack of such consideration in the perspective of transhumanist thinking determines the lack of reflection that transhumanism itself manifests as a project shifting in terms of its purposes and goals due to the ontological 'mobility' of the main object thereof (the human), and therefore, this project cannot be realized in practice in principle.

### Conclusions

The analysis of transhumanism conducted in this article revealed the ontological problematicity of this project. The aforementioned problematicity is primarily related to the ontological 'mobility' of the human as an object of cognition. As it is demonstrated in this article, such a 'mobility' of the human grounding the ontological problematicity of transhumanism can be methodologically analyzed and explicated by employing philosophical resources of Foucault and Hacking. In its turn, the phenomenon of sex can be reasonably considered as the analytical starting point whereof it becomes possible to elucidate the conceptual and practical premises underlying the ontological challenges confronted by transhumanism. It should be emphasized that the research carried out in this article is still one of the few academic works in the rapidly growing field of transhumanism studies that considers the ontological status of transhumanism and reveals the ontological problematicity of this project. In the course of further research of transhumanism, it is necessary to analyze the ontological structure in more detail thereof. Providing such analyses is the main condition in seeking to adequately define the idea of transhumanism and to assess most reasonably the project based on this idea in both aspects, the possibilities of its practical realization and its ethical status. The conclusion of this article, namely, that due to the ontological 'mobility' of its main object (the human) transhumanism

reveals itself as a project that shifts in terms of its purposes and goals, and therefore, cannot be realized in practice in principle, consequently, establishes a conceptual fundament for an ethically engaged treatment thereof. It enables us to consider transhumanism as a nihilistic ideology – or, paradoxically, an ideology without an ideal – which actually manifests not as the improvement of the human, but as their perpetual identity and anthropological remaking based on ever new emerging techno-scientific capabilities. As an attempt to ground such a treatment of transhumanism more firmly, the forthcoming research on transhumanism should be directed at a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the types of ideological and transhumanist thinking as well as of the relationship of these types of thinking to nihilistic thinking.

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