

The Borg – Glimpsing into a Nietzschean transhumanist utopia

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THE BORG – GLIMPSING INTO A NIETZSCHEAN TRANSHUMANIST UTOPIA

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Abstract

Transhumanism is a cultural and philosophical movement that advocates for the use of technology to improve the human condition and overcome limitations as a species. The question of whether the transhumanist goal of a posthuman future is desirable remains open, as it depends on the values and goals that guide the process of technological enhancement. The essay inspects what it would mean to utilize nietzschean values and goals within the process of technological enhancement. Eventhough some consider Nietzsche to be a proto-transhumanist, there is more than ample reason to believe that such an association is misguided. The argument presented here highlights why we need to avoid imbuing the goals of transhumanism with nietzschean values. To argue for the dangers inherent in nietzschean ideal the current work draws upon Losurdo and highlights the strongly Reactionary elements that can be found within Nietzsche's philosophy. Next the paper presents how by adding the Borg is a good representation of a society that has added technological enhancements upon a foundation of nietzschean ideal and encourages the abandonment of such utopian aspirations.

Key words: *Transhumanism, Nietzsche, Borg, Utopia, Reactionist*

"Transhumanism [is] the world's most dangerous idea" (Fukuyama 2004, 42). This is at least Francis Fukuyama's judgement concerning this cultural and philosophical movement. Transhumanism promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities of enhancing the human condition through the use of technology in order to improve human life (Bostrom 2005, 3). To achieve the transhumanist goal, we need to revolt against more than 2 millennia

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of philosophical indoctrination to escape the current paradigm and to revolutionize the foundation of culture, society and most fundamentally of the self. In order to improve our current lot in accordance with the transhumanist dream, we need to take control over the course of evolution, not just as individuals but as a species, and as representatives of our planet. We need to “play god”. Only by doing this can we meticulously address the problem of overcoming the limitations of our species and arrive at our destination of an improved human life.

Given the audacity of the transhumanist project it is no wonder that Fukuyama sees it as a dangerous idea. The powers that transhumanist want to release in order to achieve their vision can under certain circumstance lead to catastrophes. While realizing the next step in the evolution of the Homo species is something which at first sounds as deserving of applause. We nevertheless have to think a bit more critically about what it actually implies. As a disclaimer, I am a believer in the basic transhumanist ideal that technology can better our lives. I also support the emergence of the next iteration of the homo species. What I don’t support and think neither should any being with a modicum of wisdom is a world in which only one intrinsic good exists.

Having set the stage allow me to now get more specific by going through some terminology and the properties that I will be assigning to said terminology within the confines of this discussion. We need to differentiate between transhumanism and posthumanism. The reason we need to do this can be found within one of the points of contention present within this paper which regards Nietzsche’s overhuman and its analogy to the posthuman (Sorgner 2022, 3). As the term posthuman is used both in transhumanist and posthumanist circles, clarification on this point is necessary.

Following Francesca Ferrando (Ferrando 2019, 27–60), we say that both transhumanism and posthumanism have as a goal the realization of the post-human. In both schools the post-human can be seen as an open-ended vision of the human. This however is where the similarity ends. Historically they are rooted in two completely different philosophical traditions: 1) transhumanism has its ancestry in the enlightenment and it shares its goals of progress and reason; 2) on the other hand posthumanism is rooted in post-modernism and it aims to deconstruct the human

which it sees as a cultural and historic notion. With these distinctions in mind, we can see that although the two schools of thought utilize the same nomenclature, namely post-human, they mean two distinct things when referring to it. Posthuman under the posthumanist tradition refers to a new definition of humanity that is post-anthropocentric and post-dualist. It is a sort of egalitarian ideal. On the other hand, for the transhumanist, it essentially means a more advanced human. Thus, there is no obligation to rid oneself of all the traditional conception about what a human is, but solely of those that block one's right to use technology and science as a means of evolution. The transhumanist view can allow for a post-dual and a post-anthropocentric approach as long as it does not come counter to the idea of enhancement via science and technology which is a core precept of the transhumanist post-human.

Due to his doctrine of the overhuman many would think that Nietzsche is a precursor of transhumanism.

"I teach you the overman. Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All creatures so far created something beyond themselves; and you want to be the ebb of this great flood and would even rather go back to animals than overcome humans?" (Nietzsche 2006, 5)

While there is a raging debate in the field as to whether Nietzsche truly deserves to be considered a proto-transhumanist (where I side with Bostrom in saying he doesn't since he was not championing technology and science as an essential element for transcendence) I will leave this debate aside for now to focus on the implications of accepting the Nietzschean overhuman and the associated Nietzschean political ideal. In order to do this, I need to first outline what this program and ideal is. For this I derive most of what I will present from Losurdo's masterpiece "Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel". Before engaging with Losurdo's interpretation of Nietzsche in particular, allow me to briefly outline what I perceive to be the three main ways of interpreting Nietzsche:

1. As a Reactionist:

- a. Good reception in reactionary Political Circles – Nazis, Fascism
- b. Bertrand Russell dismissed Nietzsche for a proto-Nazi (Russell 2004, 769 & 791)

2. Existential interpretation – points out many of Nietzsche’s anti-Nazi views – Kaufmann
 - a. Heidegger took up Nietzsche²
 - b. Existential phenomenologists with egalitarian political and left wing French existentialist draw on Nietzsche³
3. Proto-Post-Structuralist
 - a. Nietzsche’s work is an analysis of power, aimed at liberating people from the strictures of coercive forms of morality
 - b. Here Nietzsche is seen as somebody who wants to create healthy and creative personalities
 - c. Genealogical critique of power and morality, that aimed to create spaces for an ethics of creation (Nietzsche 2001, 187)

What I will argue for is that after Losurdo it is unacceptable to consider Nietzsche in a benevolent way. Only an overly benevolent interpretation that closes an eye to the many regressive statements that can be found in Nietzsche’s texts would allow us to continue to see Nietzsche as a progressive, instead of a regressive aristocratic thinker that has a superb, mesmerizing rhetoric which fibrates in sync with our frustrations and our desires to be the drivers of change, the creative, the Dionysian, the *ubermensch*, the agent.

One way to best summarize Losurdo’s work comes actually from a quote from Rose:

“It is a remarkable fact that Nietzsche, a self-professed decadent, nihilist, atheist, anti-Christ, opponent of academic philosophy, and scourge of socialism, egalitarianism, and ‘the people’—who espoused aristocratic political and artistic views, insisted upon a rank of human beings, and went so far as to advise men to carry a whip when they visited the women’s quarters—is today one of the highest authorities, if not the authority, for progressive liberals, existentialist theologians, professors, anarchist speculators, leftwing critics of the Enlightenment and bourgeois society, propounders of egalitarianism, and enemies of political and artistic elitism, the advance guard of women’s liberationists and a multitude of contemporary movements, most if not all of which seem to have been castigated by Nietzsche’s unparalleled rhetorical powers.” (Rosen 1989, 189)

² Heidegger dedicated 3 books to Nietzsche.

³ I.e. Derrida, Sartre, Beauvoir.

I cannot dare to state that I will give justice to the work of people like Losurdo, Rosen, Lukas, Bull, Beiner and others within the small space allotted here. All I can state is: given the constraints I face, I will offer a brief overview of what I believe to be their strongest arguments for a regressive reactionist Nietzsche.

The key issue with respects to political modernity is where one stands to the principles of the French Revolution. This is because it was a kind of egalitarian cultural revolution in the west – “1. The aim of society is the common welfare. Government is instituted in order to guarantee to man the enjoyment of his natural and imprescriptible rights. 2. These rights are equality, liberty, security, and property. [...] Public relief is a sacred debt. Society owes maintenance to unfortunate [literally, unhappy: *malheureux*] citizens, either procuring work for them or providing the means of existence for those unable to labour” (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen 1793, Article 1, 2 & 21).

Nietzsche regards the French Revolution as a sort of catastrophe for the west. He spells this out very clearly in the genealogy of morals – “the French Revolution, that gruesome and (on close consideration) pointless farce” (Nietzsche 2001, 37); “the last great slave revolt, which began with the French Revolution” (Nietzsche 2001, 45); “Judea once again triumphed over the classical ideal with the French Revolution: the last political nobility in Europe, that of the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, collapsed under the resentment-instincts of the rabble” (Nietzsche 2006, 33). He sees it as a disaster because it aims to abolish hierarchy, rank order, inherited privilege, etc. (Losurdo 2021, 55) Any civilization that aims to realize the ideals of the French revolution will be a faux civilization and culture and will destroy itself. By engaging in this sort of cultural mutation we will not be elevated to a higher moral plane but will instead become less human. (Losurdo 2021, 86–107)

While Nietzsche does support a revolution against the Ancient Regime, this revolution is just not in the direction in which liberals and socialists had hoped for. In Nietzsche’s view, the problem with the Ancient Regime was that they were not tough enough to get the job done (putting liberalism and socialism back in their place). Thus, a more creative, vibrant, violent, and militant elite was needed in order to

accomplish the squashing of liberalism and socialism. Nietzsche wanted a revolution that would put the right hierarchy in place. This hierarchy would position a select few “aristocrats” at the top and everyone else at the bottom. (Losurdo 2021, 431–458) Nietzsche’s project is an anti-modern project in the sense that we somewhat equate modernity to egalitarianism.

By reading Losurdo’s very well documented book one can see that Nietzsche believed that unleashing the agency of certain kinds of people will lead to a more interesting and aesthetically gratifying kind of society. These people to whom agency is to be given are but a very thin elite at the top. Submission is thus what is warranted by everyone else. This view can be more attractive than the egalitarian project because here my agency and enjoyment of it is not contingent upon another’s enjoyment of their agency. For the Nietzschean elite there is no limitation. Under the Nietzschean political system if an aristocrat decides that your life can be used in the pursuit of an artistic project or vision then so be it. The aristocracies artistic project trumps the submissive’s right to life and right to the expression of their own artistic project.

With this in mind it follows that Nietzsche’s attack on Christianity is an anti-progressist attack because under Christianity all people are equal before God, while under the Nietzschean political system some are more equal than others. Christianity, if taken to its logical conclusion will generate liberalism and socialism, a regime under which all are equal and in which no overhuman can develop. (Losurdo 2021, 459–490) Thus, there comes the necessity for the emergence of a morality, a regressive morality that looks back to the ancient master moralities. By taking this regressive stance one can revive the “true” aristocratic society. Hence, when Nietzsche is defending a European civilization that was free of the decadence of the soul of the French revolution, he is defending a world free of Christianity and its philosophical Greek fathers, he is defending a Homeric European Civilization.

Nietzsche’s pessimism further underlines the need for such a strong hierarchy and limitation of agency. In his view, the masses and the elite can never both be satisfied indifferent of how much knowledge we obtain (counter to the Socratic ideal of knowledge as a universal panacea). Nietzsche holds that knowledge can grant us power over the world, but not in an optimistic way where all dissatisfaction is resolved.

Knowledge only grants us power over the world in order to build it in a way that all the dissatisfaction of an elite group of people gets resolved.

Thus, we come to Nietzsche's communitarianism (Sorgner 2022, 111–119): this consists of a few active artistic and philosophical creators and many passive workers who are there to provide for their daily needs and whims. In Nietzsche's view only by organizing society in such a way can we develop the overhuman. Here we have the problem. Because as long as we accept that there is a heritage between the Nietzschean post-human and the transhumanist posthuman, we will inescapably end up in the situation where we would develop a tyrannical polis in order to achieve our desired intrinsic good of the realization of the post-human/overhuman.

So, let us imagine a bit how such a polis could look like under the Nietzschean transhumanist normative system that would oblige us to use science and technology to develop the post-human. The first thing that comes to mind is the Borg from Star Trek. The Borg are cybernetic organisms (cyborgs) linked in a hive mind called "the Collective". They aim to continuously transcend themselves through the use of technology until they achieve perfection. The central nexus of the Borg Collective is the Borg Queen. "She brings order to the legions of voices within the Hive mind and provides a common direction — much like the queen of an insect colony" (intl.startrek.com 2011, Borg Queen). The Borg Queen has a unique personality and a sense of individuality that normal Borg drones are not allowed. She is usually the one who "speaks" for the Collective in situations where contact with outsiders is best conducted by an individual. The Queen defined herself as: "I am the beginning, the end, the one who is many. I am the Borg." Although this suggested she was an individual within the Collective, while addressing Borg drones as "my drones", she was not an individual in the sense in which we refer to it today. She is more like the module of agency or the consciousness of the Borg.

In their aim to continuously develop themselves the Borg are out on a mission to assimilate all species within the universe that could help them attain perfection. Their desire to achieve a post-Borg, or overborg state is the sole intrinsic good that matters. The Collective aims to perforate their current evolutionary equilibrium via organic, scientific,

and technological adaptation that is realized through the assimilation of other species. The Borg's dedication to a transhumanist developmental protocol can be seen starting with their way of replication. The Collective breeds their infants in maturation chambers and equip them with synthetic systems and organs from "birth". Beyond physical enhancements, the Borg are also equipped with mental enhancements. These technological enhancements rendered all Borg devoid of individual volition and caused them to work together while continuously exchanging information with the Collective. In addition, these enhancements make the individuals unable to feel emotion or to be autonomous. The cortical node ensured that emotions and individuality would be minimized amongst the Borg and, if necessary, terminates any "malfunctioning" Borgs to ensure complete obedience to the will of the Collective.

Now in Nietzschean terms, the Borg Queen is the absolute elite, the aristocrat to rule them all, the true agent and artistic soul of the species. Everything else falls under her will. All else are submissives whose role is to fulfill their ruler's desire. They exist only as objects while only the Queen, the aristocrat, exists as a subject. If we implement the Nietzschean political system, we may not end up being an intergalactic menace that destroys all life and will in the universe for the fulfillment of our ideal of creating the posthuman. But we will for sure subdue all humans, eliminate all those that disagree with us, all those that dare to express themselves outside of the confines of our established rulings, and limit people's right to procreate because certain genes should not be allowed to replicate within the species, force others to procreate because other genes are mandatory for the species, forbid personal connection beyond the depth and breadth necessary for the attainment of the posthuman ideal, limit speech by only allowing the expression of those statements that are in line with what we believe to be the truth, and many, many more horrible acts, all in the name of attaining the higher good.

If you think I am exaggerating with this, that this is just a slippery slope, I urge you to recognize that the left and the right can appropriate the Nietzschean political system. The Nietzschean political system does not discriminate between one's flavor of authoritarianism. As long as

we let one intrinsic ideal take hold of the rest, we can easily diverge into a system of tyranny the likes of which we have rarely seen.

Nietzschean Transhumanism is utopic as it believes that attaining the posthuman state will lead to a perfect future. Hence, it is defensible to engage in any sort of evil to attain this ideal because those with a “why” can endure any “how”.

As a utilitarian at heart, I cannot help but disagree with such absurdity. Any utilitarian knows that predicting the outcome of an action is a computationally intractable problem. I mean that the outcome is, of course, in the utilitarian sense of calculating the net amount of wellbeing it would create. To render such a calculation, one would need to let the universe run its course following a particular action, replace that action with another and let the universe rerun its course. This process would get repeated until the set of all possible actions which can be done in context C at time T have been exhausted in the evaluation of their net wellbeing. Stating this out loud should allow one to understand how absurd it is to state that a vision, a complex structure, will lead us to the highest possible aesthetic fulfillment when we cannot even deduce the impact of a single action. Given that the epistemic limits on utilitarian doctrine also apply to the Nietzschean overhuman ideal, it is improbable that the enormous sacrifice would ever merit the reward. Thus, the Nietzschean Transhumanist Utopia has to be abandoned.

I propose that we head in the opposite direction. Given epistemic constrain, we must acknowledge that we cannot define the ideal goal or what the post-human or overhuman should genuinely look like. To follow in the transhumanist steps, we need to ensure that people are allowed to use technology in order to pursue their enhancement. However, how they decide to do this should be left to them. Within epistemic confines, rapid prototyping with unrestrained communication and documentation is the best way to generate knowledge about what may actually lead to a better future. We will probably discover that no one path is perfect. We may discover that some paths we started that looked promising will lead to dead ends. However, by allowing people to pursue a plurality of ideals, be they mundane, transcendental, or regressive ideals, we can maximize the chances of creating the best

version of the post-human. A version that probably no one has or will ever fully develop by themselves.

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